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THE

CONFESSIONS OF GERALD ESTCOURT.

VOL. II.

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THE CONFESSIONS

OF

GERALD ESTCOURT.

BY

FLORENCE MARRYAT.
[MRS. ROSS CHURCH.]

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

"The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices
Make instruments to scourge us."—SHAKESPEARE.

LONDON:
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1867.

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THE

CONFESSIONS OF GERALD ESTCOURT.

CHAPTER I.

As soon as I had recovered the first shock of my father's death, I began to wonder that we had neither seen nor heard anything of Lady Mary. It appeared almost incredible that the telegram should have miscarried, and yet such an accident was the only solution of the mystery that my sisters and I could accept. We came to the conclusion that some cross-country telegraph office was at fault; and in consequence, I wrote my mother a long letter, detailing the circumstances of our bereavement, and our regret that the message had never reached her, thinking that the mere knowledge of its having been sent would be a comfort to her. I begged her

not to make any plans until the funeral was over, when I would pay her a visit at Guildford, and have a talk over her future prospects. Until that had taken place, of course it was impossible for me to leave the house, had I had any inclination to do so. My sisters and I were not allowed much leisure to indulge our grief. As soon as the news of my father's decease had flown round the family, the heads of the different branches arrived from far and near, and took up their residence at Grasslands, to attend the funeral and hear the will read. I had imagined that the week during which a corpse lay in the house was usually one of silent hasty meals, and a divided household; but I found it widely different. My sisters and I were naturally disinclined to issue many orders, or to enter with much zest into anything which went on; but I had begged my uncles and cousins to consider the house as their own, and they took good care to take me at my word. Eating appeared to go on at all hours of the day: so did loud and ordinary conversation; and although decency forbad their showing themselves beyond the grounds until the funeral had taken place,

they managed to make the time pass by strolling about the stables and farm, and pricing the crops and stock. My uncle Jabez had been one of the first to arrive. Strange to say, this brother of my father's, notwithstanding his curt and even rude behaviour, possessed more interest for me than any of the others. It had been matter of surprise to most of Mr. Jabez Estcourt's family that he had never married, particularly as he was supposed to be very rich; I say, supposed, because it was impossible to judge of his real income from the establishment he kept. He resided in a small cottage at Richmond, and his household consisted of two servants, a man and his wife, who did all that he required. Thence he journeyed daily to his business, and was never known to entertain, or suffer himself to be entertained by, any one—except his immediate relations. From these facts, my uncle Jabez had gained the character of being very "close." And it was an interesting speculation amongst the Estcourts, who should eventually inherit the wealth which they concluded he must be accumulating. I was, of course, after my poor father, the next male heir; but I had met with

so little favour during my lifetime at the hands of my crusty uncle, that I do not suppose I was even entered on the category of their "eligibles." The next brother in age was William Estcourt (the father of my friend Joshua), whose eldest son was called "Jabez," and with respect to whom, therefore, great hopes were entertained. Young Jabez had accompanied his father to Grasslands, and made good use of his opportunities whilst there; following his senior uncle about like a shadow; offering him his aid on every occasion, and receiving the most bearish refusals in the most lamb-like spirit; as it appeared to me, he would have taken a blow, or a kick from him.

My uncle Abel, who was a long thin man of willowy appearance, and seemed as though he had no bone in his back, and the expression of whose mouth suggested the idea that he had just swallowed an emetic, worried me greatly at first by introducing the subject of my soul and my father's soul whenever he could command an audience; but after I had given him one or two sharp replies, he discontinued the practice, and took to the less expressive one of sighing to the

ceiling whenever the conversation threatened to lean towards the forbidden topic. My uncle Joshua, as far as his character was concerned, appeared to be a duplicate of my uncle William; he was just such another hard-headed man of business, who had lived so long in the world of City and 'Change, that he had no sympathy left with anything that might not immediately influence the rise and fall of the money market. They had wives and children, both of them, but they never mentioned either; they were men who had the greatest dislike to acknowledge any feeling deeper than such as concerned their monetary affairs; they bottled up their domestic affections for home use, and doubtless occasionally forgot to uncork them even then. My great consolation was in the presence of Lord Portsdowne and George Lascelles, Jack not having been able to attend. My cousin George was what he had ever been, all affection and sympathy; and when my uncle wrung my hand and told me that as long as he lived I should never want a father, the tears were in his eyes. Had it not been for Dr. Percivale and these two I scarcely know how I should have passed through that

week with decorum. They were constantly obliged to entreat me to be more forbearing: to remember *what* lay upstairs; to think that these, my visitors, were *his* nearest relations; his own flesh and blood. But it was this thought that rendered my task of courtesy so difficult to perform. Mr. Logan was there also with his son, who I believe would not have dared to show himself within the walls of Grasslands without the protection of his father's countenance; and Mrs. Logan came in their train, and would have her finger in every pie, from the dressing of my father's body for the grave to the laying out of the dessert for dinner, averring openly and without hesitation that she found the household at sixes and sevens; that nothing had been looked after as it ought to have been; that there had been shameful neglect *somewhere*; and in her opinion, poor dear Sampson must have been positively *robbed*.

I was going to make some reply to her remarks, when Lord Portsdowne laid his hand upon my arm, and I refrained.

"No doubt of it," said Mr. Logan, decisively; "but I am afraid there is little chance of matters being mended now."

"Not under the future *régime*," rejoined his wife, spitefully; "however, that is nothing to us. I can only grieve, as I look around, to see how my poor brother permitted his extravagant tastes to outrun his prudence. There was no one to restrain or advise him, no one!" and as she spoke she glanced at the pictures which hung round the room.

"I imagine a man has a right to spend his money as he chooses," I said quickly.

"Sampson was always extravagant," observed my uncle William; "from a boy he never denied himself any luxury to which he had taken a fancy: it's a habit which, sooner or later, must lead to embarrassment."

"And, since he imagined that he had acquired such a name for his books," resumed my aunt, "he seems to have thought nothing good enough for him; and for the matter of that" (looking towards the spot where I stood, biting my lips in my endeavours to keep quiet) "to have reared his family in much the same idea; a great error, as will prove itself some day, if I am not mistaken."

"My father's legacy came in very opportunely

for Sam," said my uncle Joshua; "he couldn't have kept on in the style he was living much longer, without it. But Sampson was always for outside show; he'd rather have the flimsy thing he called fame, because it makes a man talked about, than a solid fortune. I hope those who come after him may prove to have better sense."

Lord Portsdowne's warning touch was of no more avail; I stepped forward, with eyes that, if they could, would have flashed fire upon the mean defamers of the name once borne by the body now dead upstairs.

"I'll thank you," I commenced, addressing the company in a most determined manner, "as long as you remain under this roof to refrain from carelessly handling the name of my father, or discussing the motives or consequence of any of his actions. He was worth every one of you put together, a thousand times over; and if he has left me nothing else, I have inherited from him sufficient courage to stand up for those I love, whether they be dead or alive. And I tell you all, that I will not listen to a single slur cast upon his character, either openly or by covert

insinuation. If you cannot praise, you can at least be silent."

I did not leave my position after this heated address; I stood and looked round the room for an answer, but none came. My uncles Joshua and William looked foolish; Mrs. Logan even seemed to think that they may have gone too far. At last, in rather a nervous manner, she said that "really, offence seemed to be very quickly taken;" and at the sound of her voice, the men took courage to observe, that the deceased having been so nearly related to themselves they had considered they were at liberty to talk about his doings, particularly as they had mentioned nothing but what all the world knew.

"Possibly!" was my answer; "but this is neither the time nor the place to recall anything but his many virtues. *De mortuis nil nisi bonum.* It is well for us all to remember the words, since we cannot tell how soon we may require the remembrance for ourselves. My father was, at all events, not related to *all* here; and if I look upon your remarks as uncalled for I have considered those of others as impertinent."

This I said addressing the Estcourts, but glancing towards Mrs. Logan, who shuffled about uneasily for a few seconds, and then made some excuse to leave the room. My aunt sniffed palpably, and said: Thank goodness she didn't understand Latin, or any such rubbish. My uncle William remarked, that it was "early days" for me to take up "Sampson's trick of preaching," and my uncle Joshua looked from one to the other as if he had quite forgotten what the sentence I had quoted meant, and did not like to expose his ignorance by asking.

Mr. Jabez Estcourt was not present at this little scene, having ridden over to Wiversdale early that morning. A short time afterwards he returned, bringing intelligence which drove all other thoughts from our minds. His mode of telling his news and his brothers' mode of receiving it, was so characteristic of the men, that it deserves to be recorded.

It was late on an October afternoon, and cold for the time of year, and when my uncle Jabez entered the dining-room at Grasslands, where all but my sisters were assembled, he walked

straight up to the fireplace, and spreading out his coat-tails, commenced to warm himself in the good old British fashion. One of his brothers moved his chair an inch or two backwards to make room for him, but no one spoke except myself.

"Had a cold ride, I suppose, uncle Jabez?"

"Yes," he replied, in the "grumpiest" of tones.

"All well at the Manor?"

To this question he vouchsafed no answer but a grunt, and taking out a toothpick from his pocketbook, began deliberately to pick his teeth.

"How's my mother?" growled uncle William.

"Dead!"

Mrs. Logan let the piece of work upon which she was occupied fall from her hands, and dropped, open mouthed, into a chair. My uncles Joshua and William looked at their brother for a minute as if to make sure he was not joking; but as he went on steadily picking his teeth, they came to the conclusion that he was in earnest.

"When?" ejaculated the first.

"Three o'clock."

"Humph!" said the second, filially.

"My mother *dead!*" exclaimed Mrs. Logan, who had at last found her tongue; "*never*, Jabez! When did it happen? why didn't they send for me? Sarah and Susan must have known it was coming on. What were they thinking of? Dear me! to think she should be gone, and I wasting the precious moments here; —Gerald, can I have the carriage to return to Wiversdale to-night?"

"Certainly," I replied, only too glad at the prospect of getting rid of her; and in another hour she had taken her departure.

Little by little the details of my grandmother's death were, as it were, *squeezed* out of my uncle Jabez. It appeared that she had been failing ever since her interview with my dying father; had taken to her bed as soon as she had returned to the Manor, and slept away the remainder of her life. The circumstance, at her extreme age, was not to be wondered at; but the way in which her family received the intelligence surprised all but themselves.

"D—n it," exclaimed Lord Portsdowne, bringing his fist down on the table in his hearty manner, "if I thought that George there, or any of my children, would come to sit still in their chairs when they heard their dear mother was gone, even if she lived to one hundred and eighty, I'd throttle them, Gerald, and that's the truth. It disgusted me, my boy. No wonder poor Mary couldn't get on with these people;" and then remembering *whose* people they were, the dear old fellow stopped short, blushing.

"Never mind, uncle," I said, "you and I are not the ones to discuss the subject. *He* was not like the rest; you know that well enough, and yet my mother couldn't get on with him. It has been a mystery to me all my life, and it will never be solved now."

Before we went to rest that night my uncle Jabez requested to speak to me, and became quite communicative. My father had now been dead four days; he was to be laid in the family vault at Wiversdale, and the funeral had been fixed to take place at the end of the week. He wished to know if I would delay the ceremony for another couple of days, so that the mother

and son might be interred together. I was quite willing to do so; no amount of respect that I could pay my dead father appeared too great to me, and I believed that what I had consented to he would have wished himself. It was therefore arranged that the funeral *cortége* from Grasslands should set out at a certain hour for Wiversdale, to be joined there by the other party, and that the burials should take place at the same time, after which the mourners should return first to Wiversdale Manor to hear my grandmother's will read, and thence to Grasslands to listen to that of my father. On the appointed day, everything happened as had been ordered; and my uncle Jabez and myself, as chief mourners, followed the remains of our respective parents to the grave. The combined funerals had attracted a large number of us together, and a numerous party was afterwards assembled at Wiversdale, the only members of which, specially supporting myself, were my uncle Portsdowne, George Lascelles, Dr. Percivale, and my late father's solicitors. I had not any interest in my grandmother's will; I knew that it did not concern me, and had no wish that it should; for the use

of the manor and its belongings had only been bequeathed to her, during her lifetime, and her personal possessions were the only things she had to leave away. Hearing the will read, therefore, was a mere form, until the lawyer came to that part which disposed of her jewelry, and the few hundreds she had laid by since my grandfather's death. My uncle Jabez inherited everything, from the manor and its acres down to the coal-scuttle and the hearth-broom; and the surplus money was left to my unmarried aunts. As I was listlessly hearing the trinkets next particularized, and feeling that I cared nothing if my aunt Anne or my aunt Sarah got the emerald earrings, I was roused by the sound of my own name.

"Mr. Gerald Estcourt," said the lawyer, bowing towards me—Lord Portsdowne touched my arm.

"Eh, what?" I said, starting out of my reverie, with a sigh.

"Your name is mentioned, Gerald."

"*To my grandson, Gerald Estcourt, the Castlemaine diamond ring, with my love,*" read the lawyer, deliberately.

"That must be a mistake," exclaimed my

uncle William, hurriedly. "Jabez, that ring should be yours, or mine."

"No mistake, sir," said the lawyer, blandly, "the legatee is distinctly stated."

Now, the ring erst-while in my grandmother's possession, and known as the "Castlemaine diamond," was looked upon by the Estcourt family in very much the same light as the English regard the Kohinoor. It was a remarkably large and valuable stone for private property, and had established quite a name for itself in the county. That my grandmother should leave it, or indeed anything, to me, had never entered my head for a moment. I was wonderfully surprised then, and pleased into the bargain. My relations were also wonderfully surprised, but not so much pleased, which made all the difference.

"I dispute the bequest," continued my uncle William, speaking loudly; "I never heard of such a thing. That's a family jewel, sir: a ring which has been in our possession for centuries, and always descended from son to son. It should have been left to my eldest brother here, or to myself, not to a boy who cannot know the

value of it, and will probably make ducks and drakes of it with the rest of his property."

"It is of no use becoming heated about it, Mr. Estcourt," replied the lawyer quietly; "I had the honour of drawing up this will for your late respected mother, and I know that Mr. Gerald Estcourt, and no one else, was intended to become the owner of the Castlemaine diamond. The young gentleman in question, if I mistake not, will in due course be the head of the family, and therefore, for my own part, I can conceive no fitter recipient of the family heirloom. Whatever our separate opinions, however, we have no power to alter this paper," tapping the parchment as he spoke, "which is as succinctly drawn up as any will I ever had to do with."

"It's the only thing he shall take out of this house then," exclaimed my uncle, becoming infuriated by the lawyer's complacency, "and that I'll swear. My eldest brother is not one to be cajoled and deceived into leaving away his possessions from his lawful heirs to any upstart who may think it worth his while to wheedle himself at the last moment into his good graces——"

"William, hold your tongue," growled my uncle Jabez, who had witnessed this scene with apparently the most perfect indifference. As the former proceeded with his address, I rose to my feet, preparatory to answering his charges, but Lord Portsdowne whispered to me to keep silence.

"Throw his dirty ring back in his face, Gerald, and let the matter be; it's not worth the owner of Grasslands disputing about." But it was not the ring I cared for, my possession of which was safe enough; it was my character for open dealing which was in danger.

"I am not aware to whom you allude, Mr. Estcourt," I said, advancing into the centre of the room, "when you speak of 'upstarts' wheedling themselves into your mother's good graces at the last moment; you cannot certainly mean myself, for every one here knows that instead of doing too much to win my grandmother's favour, I did perhaps too little; and the fact of her remembering me in her will is scarcely less startling to me than that the bequest should have been accompanied with her 'love.' My uncle, Lord Portsdowne, advises me to refuse

the legacy, since it gives such evident dissatisfaction to the rest of the family, but I do not feel disposed to take his counsel. I am a man now, and able to judge for myself; and my own opinion is, that my grandmother showed her good sense in leaving it to me, and that the Castlemaine diamond will be more appropriate on the finger of the future Mrs. Gerald Estcourt than on that of any other lady of the family."

So saying, I resumed my seat, and the lawyer proceeded to read out the rest of the legacies, which were small but very equally divided. I could not, however, help hearing the various remarks which followed my speech, amongst which, "insolent puppy," from my uncle William, "the impudence of him," from Mrs. Logan, and a prolonged growl from old Jabez were most apparent.

When the reading of the will was concluded, I asked the lawyer at what date the Castlemaine diamond had been bequeathed to me. I thought that it must have been since my father's death, or, at all events, since I had last arrived at Grasslands; but to my astonishment I found that my grandmother's will had been drawn up five years

before, and not touched since. At the very period, then, when our disagreements had been most frequent, and I had imagined this strange old woman liked me least, she had settled to leave me her most valuable possession. The thought softened me greatly.

The reading of the will at Grasslands was almost as much a form as it had been at Wiversdale. My father had summed up its contents in the few words he spoke to me on his death-bed; with the exception of ten thousand pounds to Emmeline, whose marriage was not so wealthy as those of her sisters, and an injunction that the allowance he had been used to make Lady Mary should be continued until her death, everything was left unreservedly to me. I had never yet been sufficiently interested to inquire of what income I should eventually become possessed; I now found that, all burthens to the estate complied with, I was the owner of a clear three thousand a year, the rest of my father's annual expenditure having been defrayed by the proceeds of his writing.

But three thousand a year, backed by such a place as Grasslands, was no mean heritage for a

young fellow of my age to come into. Lord Portsdowne said something to this effect as, the rest of my uncles having taken their departure, he kindly congratulated me on my prospects. I listened patiently until he had finished his harangue, and then my eyes went wearily round the empty room, and I seemed to feel for the first time that *his* presence could never fill it more.

"I would give it all," I exclaimed, passionately, "a thousand, thousand times over, to hear *his* voice once again." I attempted to leave the room with dry eyes as I spoke, but my uncle's kind hand was placed upon my shoulder, and I sat down at the table and cried like a child instead.

CHAPTER II.

In another week Grasslands was shut up again. My sisters had hurried away for change of scene, Lord Portsdowne and George Lascelles had returned to London, and I was on my way to Guildford. A clumsy ugly hatchment frowned from the front of the hall; the chief apartments were locked up; the shutters closed; and the old place left to as deep repose as was its late master in the vault at Wiversdale.

I arrived at Guildford late in the afternoon. The town, never a lively one, looked more cheerless than ever; the leaves were already stripped off the few trees which adorned its environs, and a steady rain had been falling for some days. The stuccoed front of the terrace where my mother still lived was green and

black from the damp and the smoke; and as I came in sight of it again, I thought I had never seen a more melancholy-looking place. Lady Mary and Miss Estcourt were not at home, so the servant who opened the door informed me. I was surprised at the intelligence, for I had given them ample notice of my arrival; but poor Marguerite was always to be seen, and in another minute I was seated by her side. This patient sister of mine had not improved in health during the last few years; on the contrary, the spinal weakness from which she suffered had greatly increased, but she had grown so used to a recumbent position that her spirits were more equable than they had been when she was first laid upon her back. Our meeting was necessarily a sad one, for Marguerite was an affectionate girl, and the fact of her never having seen her father since she could remember him, appeared, instead of lessening, to have rather aggravated her distress at the news of his death.

"If I had only known him, Gerald, for ever so short a time," she exclaimed, weeping—"if I had the slightest memory of his face, by which

to think of him, I should be so thankful; but when I attempt to recall his features it is all a blank, and I can't help fancying that when we meet again we shall not know each other."

I combated this idea as well as I could, and told her what her father had said on his death-bed, respecting his wish to see her and Lilias before he died.

"But I don't see how you could have gone to him, my dear girl," I continued, "even had the message reached you. By the way, I must make some inquiries about that telegram whilst I am here; there must have been gross carelessness somewhere, for my mother never to have received it. I know that there was no mistake on the Dorsetshire side."

Marguerite coloured a good deal whilst I was speaking, and the circumstance directed my attention to herself. She was lying on the sofa, fully robed, and on observing more closely, I saw that the material of which her dress was composed, although black, was of a very ordinary texture, and totally untrimmed by crape or any of the outward signs of deep mourning.

"This is surely very slight mourning for the

occasion, Marguerite," I said, touching the folds of her skirt. I was, of course, dressed in the deepest myself; and although I was aware that black crape and bombazine are often adopted by those who have no sorrow in their hearts, so long as the custom is an acknowledged one in society the neglect of it must imply a certain want of respect to the deceased. My sister blushed still deeper, and said that she thought it was. "But I am not able to look after such things myself, dear Gerald, as you know, and am obliged to wear whatever mamma thinks fit to buy me. I remonstrated with her, but it was of no use. She said it would be absurd of me to load my dress with crape for a person I had never seen, and I had no choice in the matter."

"And do Lilias and my mother permit the same objection to apply to themselves?" I asked, "for there might be some excuse for you, Marguerite, since you never go out."

"Lily's dress is the fac-simile of mine," she replied; "and as for mamma's, why, you'll see it, Gerald, presently, and then you can judge for yourself."

"Lilias, at all events, is old enough, and able to follow her own inclination," I said, warmly.

"Lilias is led in everything by mamma," replied Marguerite.

"Marguerite, tell me," I exclaimed, as a sudden suspicion struck my mind, "did that telegram ever reach my mother?"

"Oh! ask her yourself, Gerald, pray don't ask me; it is all so miserable and so wretched; I cannot bear to think of it."

I refrained from further questioning, as she desired me; but her evasion raised some very bitter thoughts in my heart, and as I heard my mother's footsteps in the hall, I rose to my feet, with a stern determination, should my suspicions prove correct, to tell her what I thought of her behaviour. She entered the room, accompanied by Lilias, and saluted me in the most off-hand manner, as if nothing unpleasant had occurred since we had last met, or rather as though we had parted the day before, and had only to relate the adventures of the intervening twelve hours to one another. I saw at a glance that both she and my sister had on dresses and mantles which might have passed for ordinary

costume, that Lady Mary wore no widow's cap, and that white flowers mingled with the black net and silk of which Lilias' bonnet was composed. I stood by Marguerite's sofa, biting my lips and regarding my mother with marked displeasure in my countenance, as she advanced to greet me, saying carelessly—

"What, my dear Gerald; you here already?" Lily and I made sure we should be home in time to welcome you; however, I suppose Marguerite has been doing her best to amuse you."

"I was not likely, mother," I said, as I coldly returned her kiss, "to expect or to wish for much amusement, coming straight as I have from the scene of so great a bereavement as my father's death has been to me; but I confess you might have prepared a better welcome for me than the sight of so much disrespect paid to his memory."

"Disrespect paid to your father's memory, Gerald! what are you talking about?" she asked, sharply; whilst Lilias, turning towards me, appeared quite ready to engage in an argument on the subject, and poor Marguerite, with

burning cheeks, cast her eyes down upon her lap.

"I am talking about what I *see*," I answered, firmly. "Mother, I know very little about ladies' dresses, and such things; but however slight my experience, it has been sufficient to teach me that few people would guess from your appearance, and that of my sisters, that you had just lost a husband and they a father."

Lady Mary looked perfectly conscious of the meaning of my address; but the only effect it produced was to cause a rapid hardening of her eyes and mouth; and when she adopted this expression, I knew of old that some remark deteriorating to my father's character was sure to follow.

"Can you say with truth, Gerald," she commenced, in her most icy tones, "that I *have* lost a husband or my daughters a father? You were an infant in arms when I left Grasslands, and you are now of age. During all that time we have neither known nor seen the person whom you mention. His death makes no difference to us either way, excepting that the Lord has mercifully lifted a very heavy yoke from off

my shoulders." And my mother finished her sentence with a deep sigh.

"But it was by your own desire that you separated from him," I rejoined, quickly. "If I have understood my uncle Portsdowne rightly, whoever was the first to propose a separation, you were the one most eager to adopt and carry out the plan. He has told me more than once that it was not only his wish, but even my father's, that you and he should come to some sort of compromise in the matter; but that, the idea once started, you never lost a moment until the whole business was completed."

At this Lady Mary became very angry.

"My brother Portsdowne had no right to discuss the matter with such a boy as you are, still less to enlighten you as to his private opinions. I consider he is greatly to blame, and I shall take an early opportunity of telling him so."

"That must be as you please, mother," I replied; "but it has nothing to do with the question in hand. I left my three elder sisters dressed as I am myself, in the deepest mourning; I come here to find Lilias and Marguerite

robed in ordinary black dresses, and yourself without even the mark of your widowhood. Your feelings on the subject you cannot prevent; but for the neglect of an outward form there can be no excuse, and I consider your present behaviour scarcely decent."

A dead silence followed this speech: I had expressed myself without warmth, but with great determination, for I felt indignant, remembering the kindness with which my father had spoken of these women on his death-bed, to find that they were even putting themselves to trouble in order to show their indifference to what had been so great a loss to myself. My mother and sister were about to take this opportunity to leave the room, but I detained them.

"Whilst we are on this subject," I said, "let us have done with it. Mother, did you ever receive the telegram which I sent you from Grasslands?"

"The telegram on the first occasion of your father's danger?" she inquired.

"Yes: what other? the message which told you of his approaching death and desire to see you. Did it reach Guildford?"

"It did, Gerald."

"You got that message, mother, and you never came?"

"I got that message, Gerald, and I never came. It may be all very well, when a man has behaved for twenty years with systematic cruelty to the woman whom he made his wife, for him to wish to patch up a reconciliation, as a salve to his conscience, when he knows himself to be dying; but you must excuse me if I say that I have no faith in the sincerity of a desire which has been so long delayed. A few words are easily spoken, but they can have no power to obliterate the memory of years of coldness. I might have gone to Grasslands, and taken up my station at your father's bedside; but I should have been no more his widow in feeling for that act than I am now. I could not conscientiously have said that I had any pleasure in meeting him again. I trust I have forgiven the injuries I have received from him and his people; but I have not forgotten them, and it is not in human nature to suppose that I should."

"God forgive you!" I exclaimed, passionately. "And that man spoke as kindly of you

on his dying bed as he could have done; sent you his forgiveness, trusted he had yours, and spoke with hope of meeting you again where there should be nothing but peace between you."

Lady Mary smiled in a wintry manner, and shook her head as if there was little chance of my poor father gaining the same rest to which her long-suffering purity entitled her.

"I trust it may be so, Gerald; though I have little faith, as I told you before, in a death-bed repentance. 'Through much tribulation' we inherit the kingdom."

"I expect there are some of us who will never inherit it at all," I exclaimed, bluntly; "and my Bible reading has taught me that we are none the safer for making so sure upon the subject."

"I shall not argue the matter with you, Gerald," replied my mother, sternly. "You received good training whilst you were under my care; but you have been now, for many years past, removed from my influence, and I do not expect that you will be brought back into the fold, except as through fire. Till that blessed event happens there can be no sympathy

between you and me on matters which concern the soul."

"My object in coming down to Guildford," I said, taking no notice of the gauntlet she had thrown down, "was to consult with you on your future prospects. By my late father's will you are entitled to continue to receive the allowance he made for you for the remainder of your lifetime; and it was his desire (a desire with which I trust, mother, notwithstanding your thankfulness for your release, that you will, for my sake and my sisters', comply) that you should henceforward take up your residence at Grasslands. I am amply otherwise provided for, and in carrying out his wishes you will be acceding to my own. It is with the intention of settling this business with you that I am here."

At this proposal Lady Mary turned positively white with rage.

"Live at Grasslands!" she exclaimed; "return to the place from which I was expelled, which ought by right to have been left to me, as a pensioner on *your* bounty; permit my daughters to be patronised by the people who took pains to be insolent to myself! This is indeed the last

drop in the cup. If things were as they should have been, Gerald, everything in that establishment would have been left to me, at all events until my death; and I should have been laid under obligation to no one; as it is——"

"As it is, mother, they are as good as left to you; my father's wish was that you should enjoy Grasslands and all its belongings for the rest of your lifetime, and you need not be afraid that I shall ever remind you that you are keeping me out of my property."

"It is no such thing," she answered, rudely. "Such an arrangement is only another instance of your father's wish to insult me; and you must be mad to have consented to be the bearer of such a message. Do you imagine that I would subject myself to meeting again *your* uncles and aunts" (since I had been regarded by my mother in the light of my father's son the whole burden of the family was invariably laid upon my shoulders) "with the memory of their former insults fresh in my mind?"

"Fresh after a lapse of twenty years?" I replied. "You must have a retentive mind for others' trespasses, mother. My father was sixty-

lve, and you are but a few years younger. Is .t worth while to cherish enmity when we have so short a time in which to indulge it? You have always told me that my grandmother was your bitterest enemy; she, at all events, is gone, and during the last months of her life expressed no ill-feeling against yourself, as I can testify; and I begin to think now that much of what you conceived to be especial spite was due to the roughness of her character."

I then detailed the story of Mrs. Estcourt's will, and the fact of her having left me the celebrated Castlemaine diamond five years before. "And I shall always value it," I continued, "less for its intrinsic worth than for the insight which the reception of it has given me into the feelings which my poor old grandmother evidently cherished in my behalf."

Lady Mary burst into tears of rage.

"*Go on,*" she said, witheringly, between her breath-catching sobs. "Go on, Gerald. Extol your grandmother to the skies! Of course she was everything that is delightful! *I* have never loved you or taken care of you; *I* have not watched over you, and prayed to God for your

welfare night and morning. Your mother is *nothing;* she has no grand houses and estates to leave you; no money, wherewith to indulge your body to the detriment of your soul; no *diamond rings*" (my mother almost ground her teeth over these words) "to bequeath, whereby you may remember the feelings she has cherished for you." And here Lady Mary's sobs choked her further utterance.

"This is perfectly absurd!" I exclaimed. Young men, and indeed men of all ages, have seldom much sympathy with a woman's tearful reproaches, particularly reproaches that are mixed with so much sarcasm and so little sense, and my indignation against my mother's present conduct and opinions was very great; but my former affection for her, although wearied by her constant appeals to it, had not all died out, and I knew that, however great her injustice, her trials had been of adequate proportion. Some thought of this kind flashed through my mind now, and prevented me from answering her as harshly as I might otherwise have done.

"You know as well as I do, mother, that the difference between your circumstances and those

of my father or grandmother has never made the least difference in my love for you. You can scarcely have thought how great an insult you offer to my capacity for right feeling by the supposition, or you would surely never have made it. The separation between our parents has been fraught with miserable consequences to all of us; not the least of which, to myself, is the fact that as soon as my father commenced to love me, you ceased to do so. But you cannot accuse me of having inherited the fickleness of your disposition: as far as in me lay I have always tried to love and do my duty to you both; and if your jealousy was so great that you would not accept a divided affection, that was not my fault. All earthly rivalry is now over between you; as far as you are concerned your son belongs to you only; but if we are to renew, and to continue, on terms of peace with one another, it must be on the understanding that all honour is paid, in my presence, to my father's memory, both by word, deed, and insinuation. I tell you now frankly, what during his lifetime I hardly dared to say, that I loved my father from the bottom of my heart, and that I shall always cherish the remembrance of his

goodness to me as one of the greatest blessings I have received at the hands of heaven."

I think my mother was considerably struck by the firmness with which I spoke, and perhaps she admired the boldness my words displayed, for she ceased her wailing and made me a very calm and sensible reply. But all my endeavours to persuade her to agree to her late husband's wish by living at Grasslands proved unavailing. She stoutly refused to go near, or have anything to do with the place; and when I put it on the plea of looking after the house for myself, she advised me to ask Emmeline and Colonel Talbot to accept the charge.

"Your sister has not the same unpleasant recollections connected with it which would make Grasslands hateful to me. Since you wish it, Gerald, we will in future avoid all discussions of, or reference to, the doings of your late father, but you must, on your part, cease trying to persuade me even to look again on a spot where I have been so miserable."

"But surely you will not remain in Guildford, mother," I said; "it is a wretchedly dull place for the girls; and you will all be the better for a

change." At this my sisters looked up eagerly; it was evident that my proposal met with their approbation.

(Here I must digress for a moment in order to relate that Lilias' engagement to the round-faced curate, who was of strictly evangelical principles, had been brought to an abrupt conclusion the year before, by his marrying a round-faced cousin of his own, for whom it appeared he had always entertained a sneaking affection, and the proposed match having been one that my father totally disapproved of, he had not thought fit to take any steps to resent the affront offered to our family. Since which event my sister and mother had rushed from the lowest depths of one extreme to the most giddy heights of the other; and from having been scandalised at the sight of a cross or the mention of a candle, were now stanch observers of all the ceremonies of the Ritualistic service.)

This being the case, no obstacle existed to their leaving Guildford, and Lady Mary seemed to be of my opinion.

"I have thought of it, Gerald," she replied, "more than once; and if Marguerite had been

fit to travel, Lilias and I would have liked to have gone abroad for a short time; but we have as yet decided nothing. It is, however, pretty certain that we shall leave Guildford. What are your own intentions?"

A plan for poor Marguerite's benefit flashed through my mind whilst my mother was speaking; but I said nothing of it on that occasion. I told her that in accordance with my father's expressed desire, I had already sent in my resignation of the service, and that I intended to spend the next few years in travelling, preparatory to settling down to a literary life. It had always been the path chalked out for me, and the success of the "Quarry of Fate" had decided me to adopt it. My mother thoroughly disliked the army; but she pretended to hold the profession of literature in the greatest contempt.

"I had rather," she exclaimed, "that you had chosen to be anything than an author. The only point on which the late Mrs. Estcourt and I ever agreed was in contemning the waste of time necessarily involved in the production of frivolous tales and romances, Oh, Gerald! I

wish that you would turn your thoughts towards our holy church."

I reminded her that to write was not, of necessity, to produce trash; that even novels, which carried any weight with them, were capable of influencing mankind; and that I was not careless enough to enter holy orders without a decided tendency towards the vocation. Still, the mere fact of my wishing to follow my father's profession (simply because it *was* his) was gall and wormwood to Lady Mary; and her prejudices being too strong and too unreasonable to be battled with successfully, I abandoned all attempt to do so during the short time I spent at Guildford.

If the character of my mother appears inconsistent to such as may remember how much more forbearing she at one period seemed towards my father and the treatment she had received from him, I can only urge, in answer to the objection, that inconsistency is the most human of failings, and that the heroine who is systematically virtuous is as unnatural a creation as the villain who systematically errs. If no one in this world is perfect, it is equally true that no

one is entirely bad, and that, as the very best have their faults, so surely do the very worst possess some loveable qualities.

My mother's strong point was her love for her children, and jealousy, the vice which almost trampled the virtue under foot. My father was capable of conceiving and inspiring a warm, frank affection, but his obstinacy too often prevented such feeling having fair play. During his lifetime, my mother's pride, and perhaps her cowardice, forbad her saying all she thought about him; for her reticence, since it did not prompt her to avowed forgiveness, could have sprung from no worthier motive. He, on the contrary, steadfastly opposed during his prosperity to even hearing the mention of her name, relented as soon as he felt that his opportunities for reconciliation were slipping away from him, and wished nothing better than to die friends with her.

Which character was the most loveable, or which the worthiest of love, I leave my readers to determine. Perhaps, being so widely opposite, they were not equally responsible for the effect which circumstances had upon them. "*Non nostrum tantas componere lites.*"

I left Guildford with the fixed idea of asking Colonel Talbot and Emmeline to reside at Grasslands during my absence from England; and Lady Mary to allow Marguerite to stay there with them. I saw that the girl was not happy under present circumstances, and that the proposed plan would leave my mother and Lilias at liberty to carry out their wish to go abroad.

Strange to say, all turned out as I desired.

Colonel Talbot had had enough of knocking about to last him his lifetime, and, as soon as he heard of my father's legacy to Emmeline, had determined to retire on half-pay. They were, therefore, only too pleased to consent to occupy Grasslands for me; and Emmeline was delighted with the prospect of having Marguerite for a companion.

When it was made known to that poor girl that her sister not only wished to have her, but that Lady Mary had consented that she should go, she was nearly beside herself with gratitude to me and pleasure in her new prospects; and before I left England I had the satisfaction of seeing her comfortably settled under Emmeline's

wing, and delighted with the novel occupation of teaching little Ethel how to read and write.

My mother then got rid of the house and furniture at Guildford, and prepared, with Lilias, to take up her residence in Paris. She was very desirous that I should live with them there, but this I declined. I had no objection to accompany them to their destination, and see them safely at their journey's end, but I had no wish to settle down in a city, or, indeed, anywhere, for some time to come. I had felt the events of the last few months more than I cared to acknowledge, and I wanted a complete change. I wanted to leave everything that worried me behind; even the recollection, if such was possible, of what had given me pain. And this was not to be effected whilst I moved in the same circle, seeing the old familiar faces, hearing the old familiar voices. I had my mind to enlarge, too; to stretch with new sights and new thoughts; to improve by study and by practice; to render worthy, in fact, to take up the thread of my father's fame, where death had cut it short, and, if possible, add lustre to it. As I thought of this, my eye would brighten, my

breast swell, and myself feel that I had been singled out by fate for the pursuance of a high and lofty duty. My resignation of the army having been accepted, I left England, full of noble aspirations, and determined to fulfil them to the utmost. It is so easy to plan and to resolve, so hard to continue and to do!

CHAPTER III.

"*It is difficult for a man to speak long of himself without vanity: therefore I will be short.*" Such are the opening words of Hume's brief autobiography, which altogether occupies but a few pages.

I endorse the sentiment and wish that I could follow the example. Feeling how hard it is to keep egotism in the background, and yet in justice to myself to relate such circumstances as may palliate the follies of my life, I have already been tempted, more than once, to throw down my pen in disgust; and would have done so, had it not been for the thought that I assumed the office of historian less to transcribe the events of my own matter-of-fact career, than to do honour to the character of one whose

virtues set her as far above the level of mankind as I myself am beneath it. Keeping this end in view, I take heart to proceed.

I was away from England for two years. For two years I wandered about in strange places, never staying anywhere long, although I visited many of them more than once. After leaving my mother and Lilias in Paris I went on to Germany, Switzerland, and Italy, crossing into Spain and Portugal, and lingering in these sunny lands for some months at a time. I did not often travel alone, having generally the good fortune to fall in with some of my countrymen; now with a parcel of riotous boys, "seeing the world" under the auspices of a tutor, whom they drove nearly frantic in his efforts to keep them together and restrain their wildness; then with an author travelling "on commission," and anticipating his profits; and again with a good old-fashioned British family, the ladies of which kept me fully employed in settling their disputes, making their bargains, and stowing away in my unfortunate valise the purchases which they could not get into their own boxes.

At one period George Lascelles joined me, and we journeyed for many a league together; and a season, long to be remembered (less I fear for its steadiness than its charms), was spent by Jack Lascelles (who was still my boon companion and dearest friend) and myself in Paris. But during all this time I was not exactly idle. I carried a note book with me wherever I went, and I let little escape my notice.

I believe the only two things which I did *not* do, were the ascent of Mont Blanc, and making acquaintance with the German gaming-tables.

Both experiences I knew to be considered orthodox for the young Englishman abroad, but perhaps my tastes were peculiar. The first feat had been attempted too often, and accomplished too seldom to prove a temptation to me; added to which, those who had tried it, successfully or otherwise, had talked so much on the subject that they had drained it of all novelty: and to abstain from the second phase of "fast life" (which might more appropriately be termed "fast death") I considered as part fulfilment of my dying father's injunction not to soil his name.

But at the end of the two years I began to feel home-sick. As far as my own establishment was concerned, I had not much, it is true, to draw me thither, but I longed to see Grasslands again, and my sisters' faces, and to take up my position in the world as my father's son. So I made up my mind to return; abruptly at the last, as was my nature, and bent my steps homewards, taking Paris on my way. There I found my mother and sister still very comfortable, and apparently without any present intention of moving. I stayed with them a few days, and was astonished at the different tone their conversation had assumed to what I remembered it at Guildford. The vanities of this wicked world appeared to be influencing not only Lady Mary's dress, but her tastes and manners. She was as eager now about society and amusement as she had once been opposed to both; and she was permitting Lilias to receive the attentions of a certain Mons. Le Sage; a gentleman, I allow; a "vicomte," of course, but a Roman Catholic into the bargain; and when I ventured to suggest that a marriage between persons of opposite faith was not likely

to be productive of much happiness, my argument was met by as long a string of refutations as my objections to the round-faced curate in the days of old had been. Leaving my mother, therefore, to the pursuance of her new opinions, and my sister to her prospective conjugal bliss with Mons. le Vicomte, I took my departure from Paris, charged with their love and a box of bonbons for Marguerite, but not a word of regret for their lengthy separation, or a wish expressed that they might soon meet again.

I arrived in London about Easter, and the first house I went to was that of Lord Portsdowne, whose family had just come to town for the season. The welcome I received was as hearty as I could have desired; I found my uncle and aunt but little changed, and my cousins, Lady Mary and Lady Cecilia Lascelles, transformed into elegant, fashionable women, but not too much so to object to my resuming the brotherly terms upon which I had met them from the time I was a boy.

Before I had been there ten minutes,

"Sit down, Gerald," exclaimed my uncle,

pointing to a chair contiguous to his own, "and tell me exactly what you wish—hope—and intend to do. Of course you will keep on the house in Brook Street."

The residence in question had been taken on a lease of twenty-one years, more than half of which time had still to run. It had been let during my absence, but was again vacant, and after a short visit to Grasslands, I intended to return to London and superintend its being put in order for my reception.

"If I am to write," I said, "I must have a house to myself; and as long as the Talbots will consent to look after Grasslands for me I shall live chiefly in town. I should not like to let the old place to strangers, but I could not reign there in solitary grandeur."

"I suppose you know that Mr. Jabez Estcourt has sold Wiversdale."

"Has he indeed? what did it fetch?"

"One hundred thousand; a long price, but it was worth it. Hawkins, the great City grocer, purchased, and has doubtless decorated it after his own taste. But I was surprised at your uncle not settling there himself, particularly as

the name of Estcourt has long ranked with those of the county families."

"It is a pity," I observed; "but I suppose the country is too dull to suit his ideas, and he has taken up a gorgeous residence nearer town. Where does he live now?"

"In the same little cottage at Richmond," replied Lord Portsdowne, laughing at my astonishment; "there'll be a good lump of money for some one at his death, Gerald, eh? perhaps it will come to you after all, my boy!"

"To *me?*" I exclaimed with unaffected incredulity. "No, uncle, the mountains will be moved into the sea first. But I shall run down to Richmond and visit the old gentleman as soon as I have leisure. There is an honesty about uncle Jabez which I cannot help liking, notwithstanding the crust which envelops his nature. He is certainly not a flatterer, but at the same time, I feel I could trust him never to do a mean or dirty action. His character seems to me like that of my father, without the frank geniality which rendered the latter so universal a favourite, and which a man of the world knows it politic in some measure to display,

whether he feels it or not. I think there's a great deal of good hid under my old uncle's crustiness, although perhaps few would believe it."

"There's no accounting for tastes," said Lord Portsdowne shortly.

I slept but one night beneath his hospitable roof, and then I went down to Grasslands, and found all there well and happy. Emmeline had recovered much of her former looks; Marguerite, though no stronger, was beaming with content and good humour, and Talbot, with the aid of my bailiff, had been looking after the farm in first-rate style, and had a long balance entered to my credit in his formidable ledger. I fancied there was a look of relief on the face of poor Marguerite when I told her there was little chance of Lady Mary returning to England; but she accepted her bonbons with thankfulness, and expressed no regret at their not being accompanied by a letter. My sisters both made great outcry when I announced my intention of living in Brook Street, and declared that it was my bounden duty to stop at Grasslands and look after the calving of the cows and the ploughing of the turnip-fields; but I replied

that they had done all that so admirably for me that I could not think of taking it out of their hands just yet.

"But don't flatter yourself that you will have got rid of me altogether, Emmy," I continued, "when I leave this for town: for I intend to bear down upon you at all sorts of times; whenever I want a breath of fresh air, in fact; and as soon as the season is over, you may expect to see me for three months at least."

They were good enough to say that they should anticipate nothing more than the close of the season, and so I left them and stayed with the Lyndons in Curzon Street until my own house was ready for me.

Time appeared to have had no effect whatever upon my sister Gertrude, unless, indeed, in rendering her prettier and more charming than ever. She was one of those little graceful women with *piquante* faces who never look matronly, but flit about like girls until at some remote period age drops suddenly on them, and steadies them into placid unwrinkled old ladies. She had a nursery full of waxen little dolls, whom she dressed very nicely and kissed very

much, but affection for whom never kept her giddy self from one drive in the Park or evening at the Opera. Gertrude was, in fact, a most thorough flirt; but withal so open and free from any intention of evil, that I, although her brother, felt no right to blame her, particularly as her husband appeared to approve of all her goings on. My brother-in-law, Horace Lyndon, was a quiet, good-tempered fellow, not wanting in sense, but a very different stamp of man from his vivacious brothers, and his wife's multifarious flirtations seemed rather a source of amusement to him than otherwise.

"I wouldn't be an unfortunate boy like that poor young Henderson," he said to me one day, "to come under the battery of Gerty's glances during my first season for anything. She'll drag him about after her for a couple of months like a puppy with a chain, and when she meets him next year she'll have forgotten all about him in company with a dozen others. Ha! ha! ha!"

"Don't you think that Gertrude is rather thoughtless?" I remarked to my uncle shortly afterwards. "If I had a wife, I shouldn't like her to appear day after day in company with

the same men, as she does. I know she means no harm, but I am surprised Lyndon does not object to it."

"My dear Gerald," he replied, "*there's safety in numbers;* always remember that. People are very apt to judge with harshness the woman who flirts promiscuously; but they only evince their ignorance of human nature by doing so. If a husband wants cause for being jealous, let him look behind his doors and in his coal-cellars, not among the men who lean over his wife in his presence and tell her she is the most charming creature they ever met. My son is a sensible fellow, who will never ruin his domestic happiness for a mere puff of wind, and Gertrude is too wise a girl not to appreciate his goodness. I am not in the least afraid for my daughter-in-law, so don't you take alarm for your sister. Depend upon it, Lyndon is quite able to take care of her and himself too."

Before I had taken possession of the house in Brook Street, decided of what servants my establishment should be composed, and settled myself in my father's vacant chair, Beatrice arrived in town for the season, and George and

Jack Lascelles met at their father's for the same purpose. Thus I was surrounded by all my own friends and launched at once into a course of gaiety from which I should have found it very difficult to extricate myself. I had intended, as soon as I was again settled in England, to apply myself seriously to my writing. I had collected all the materials for my novel, sketched out the plot, decided on the situations, and had nothing to do but to compose the story. But to steadily pursue a sedentary occupation on my first reappearance in town was a harder task than I had calculated upon. However great my own desire, my friends would not permit me to sit still for an hour at a time.

I had scarcely settled myself to my work perhaps, reckoning on a clear afternoon, when I would hear the sound of the hall bell, followed by either the announcement that visitors awaited me in the drawing-room, or the noisy footsteps of Jack or George as they flew upstairs to drag me by main force from my sanctum, and insist upon my accompanying them wherever their restless spirits dictated. At last I gave up the attempt in despair, and decided that "the

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season" was *not* the time for writing, especially the first season which I had spent in England for years.

"Of course not, old boy!" as Jack remarked, when I confided my difficulty to him. "The season's the time for dinners and '*wines*,' and, by-the-by, when are you going to give us another?"

I had not been long in Brook Street before my little dinners and suppers began to be noted amongst the bachelors of my acquaintance, and I had acquaintances of all sorts. Old friends of my father's came to see me continually, and made me welcome amongst them in a manner which I felt bound to repay; members of my family also, having apparently dropped the recollection of any little disagreement which may have existed between us (an event which gave me no less pleasure than surprise), reminded me of their existence by calling in Brook Street, and congratulating me on my return to England. Amongst the latter, astonishment one day almost startled me out of my civility, as I recognized Thomas Logan, but his manner was so cordial, that I could not, without direct

rudeness, have refused to ignore the untoward circumstances under which we parted. His presence could never be productive of other than unpleasant recollections to me; but when I asked him to dinner, in company with Joshua Estcourt and several others, he accepted the invitation so eagerly that I began to think that perhaps I had, after all, misjudged him. I found that he was living with his family at Sydenham, and before we parted, he asked me to visit them there. "If ever you want a puff of fresh air, you know, Estcourt, there you have it, and my mother will always give you a shake-down if you like to come. Don't forget the address,—Madeline Villa, Percival Road, Sydenham,—dinner at six,—and any day that suits yourself will be convenient to us."

If this proffer of friendship on the part of Thomas Logan surprised me, what must I have felt upon reaching home, one afternoon, to hear that Mrs. Logan awaited me in the drawing-room. The thought of my aunt Anne had prevented me from acceding at once to my cousin's proposal, for I could not forget the words in

which she had spoken of my father and myself, yet here she was patiently resting upon one of my easy-chairs until I should be pleased to make my appearance; and if not transformed into a very affectionate aunt, at least much changed from what she had been.

"I have come to scold you," she said, as I shook hands with her, "for not having done as Tom asked you, and been to see us at Sydenham. Your sisters, Gerald, are such *very fine* ladies that I can hardly expect them to do me the honour of a call; but as your name is Estcourt, and you have not yet married into the aristocracy, perhaps you will not carry your head too high to acknowledge your father's nearest relations."

I assured her of what was true, that it had never been my wish to do so; and that if a want of cordiality existed on either side, it had certainly not originated with our branch of the family. I believed that my sisters held aloof from their relatives simply because their company never appeared welcome to them, and that they only required an assurance that it was so, to be ready, not only to visit at their houses, but to receive them at their own. I spoke

quietly, but I could not evince much interest in the subject because it so little affected me. I was willing to bury the hatchet, and pass over all that had gone before, but I could not pretend to myself that I had forgotten it: if the insults had been levelled at me, instead of my father and mother, the case might have been different. Mrs. Logan sniffed in her old manner as I concluded, and changed the subject by commenting upon the furniture and fitting-up of the apartment.

"There is surely a smell of tobacco here, Gerald!" she said, using her nose for the purpose of detection; "but I hope you don't permit smoking to go on with those beautiful curtains."

I laughed, and said that I was afraid my friends did just what they pleased in my apartments, and were not much in the habit of taking the beauty of my curtains, or any other article in my possession, into consideration. Mine was quite a bachelor's establishment. I was not used to the honour of a lady's presence in my room, or the knowledge might make us all more careful. I feared I had no untainted apartment into which to ask her, but I trusted

she would excuse the fact, and in future I must be the one to pay my *devoirs* at Sydenham. This I said, hoping it would be a hint to her not to intrude upon my privacy again. But she appeared impervious to a suggestion.

"Oh! I don't mind it," she replied. "I was thinking of the furniture, Gerald, not of myself: and very far from keeping me away from Brook Street, I dare say I shall often pop in upon you about luncheon time. When business brings me up to town, it is generally to the West End; and I find it so convenient to have a friend to go to, and particularly in such a central situation. Have you lunched yet? What's your usual hour?"

I never took luncheon myself, but, of course, I told my aunt that she could always have it at any hour she chose; and as business afterwards appeared to bring her up to London pretty often, I had quite as much of her company as I desired. It is true that I did not always force myself to join her midday meal: sometimes I was engaged when she "popped" in upon me; sometimes, being a lazy fellow, not out of bed; but my presence or absence seemed to make no

difference to my aunt Anne. She always made very good use of the permission I had extended her, and from all accounts appeared to enjoy an excellent appetite.

The rest of my family flocked about me, the younger members especially, and I both entertained, and was entertained by, their fathers and mothers. My uncle William and Mr. Logan were the only two who kept aloof from me. Of these, one was openly quarrelsome, the other silently sulky. I met the former at the table of my uncle Jabez, and encountered so much insolence at his hands that I told him publicly that I would never sit down to dinner with him again, at which outburst his elder brother grunted, but expressed no sign of either disapprobation or approval, although he continued to send me an occasional invitation to his cottage at Richmond; the moods of the latter, on the contrary, were beneath my notice, further than by keeping me away from Sydenham, as they did. This, then, was the condition in which I now found myself with respect to my relations. I never felt much in my element when mixing with them; they were not to me like the Lascelles and my im-

mediate friends; but we were always friendly and social upon meeting, and I did not stop to inquire whether they or myself derived most benefit from the intercourse. My sisters laughed, and prophesied that their new regard was not quite disinterested, and would last just as long as was convenient to themselves, an opinion which I was always ready to meet with a lengthy dissertation on the folly and wickedness of trying to keep up dissension between persons so nearly connected by blood. I was conceited enough to believe that my father's family had really discovered something in myself to conquer their uncalled-for dislike; simple enough never to suspect that my improved condition and increased influence were at the bottom of their unsought proffers of friendship, and that the same jealousy they had displayed towards their lucky brother was smouldering beneath the honey of their words to me, and only requiring an occasion to light up into a flame. The social position which I now occupied was undoubtedly a good one. I was a member of three of the best clubs in London, hand in glove with many young men of the highest families, the possessor of a very pretty

stable, and of an uncommonly good cellar. I made my cousins welcome to a share of all my good things; they borrowed my horses, drank my wine, and made use of my purse whenever they had cause for doing so, and I acceded to their requests, glad of an opportunity to lay them under an obligation which should make them feel the close connection between us. Thus, surrounded by flatterers as well as friends, cursed with a long purse, a short age, and a spirit of incorrigible thoughtlessness, I began life on my own account under as great disadvantages as a man could. Young fellows with limited allowances or moderate pay are apt to speak of the independent and rich of their acquaintance as "deuced lucky," but it would be more correct were they to reverse their opinion. A necessity for labour is the best heritage a father can leave his son, and a little wealth a most dangerous thing. The command of mine led me, not into extravagance, for my desires were moderate, and it covered them, but into idleness, which is the root of all evil, and left me space to run into every description of folly. Contrary to the experience of most men, I had been kept from much

of this abroad, chiefly for the reason that I moved about so rapidly that I had no time to make familiar acquaintance in the towns I passed through. I had been perfectly happy and contented, however, with the life I led, had felt no lack of excitement, and sighed for nothing better; the novelty of foreign travel having kept me from missing the dissipation usual to my age. But now that I had been reintroduced to such scenes I marvelled that I could have existed away from them so long; that I could have given up, for two whole years, of my own free choice, the delights which awaited me in England. Consequently, I plunged into them headlong. I have no wish to excite feminine interest by writing myself down a desperate rake, at this or any period of my life.

I was not such. I was simply, what all other young men who mix in the world are, thoughtless, ready for any amusement, and fonder of running about by night than by day. I lived in two worlds. One was when I rode in the Park by the side of some highborn creature on horseback, or grazed my animal's legs against the wheels of a carriage wherein reposed the portly form

of a dowager, at whose house I had spent the previous evening, and where I had made my appearance redolent of Ess. Bouquet, in embroidered shirt and infinitesimal necktie, to dance until the small hours with the prettiest girls of the season; or to lean over their chairs at the Opera, and whisper nonsense under cover of the music, whilst they held their fans before their mouths, and turned their eyes upwards as they murmured their half-reproachful, half-approving answers. The other world—when I rushed off, at the conclusion of the aforesaid opera or ball, with companions of similar taste, into an atmosphere which made it of little consequence whether I was scented with one of Rimmel's distillations or the essence of tobacco; and into the presence of women, from whose recognition by daylight I should have fled as from a pestilence.

The incongruity of such an existence used often to strike me forcibly. Holding the hand of some pure girl in the dance; pouring my abominable balderdash into her ears; and receiving, perhaps, some little modest token in return, that proved I was at least not obnoxious

to her—the thought would suddenly flash into my mind, what would she think, say, and feel, if she only knew the scenes from which I had freshly come, the conversation I had heard, the company I had mixed with? And the idea would have sufficient power to make me retreat within myself, put an end to my compliments, and perhaps cause a shade of disappointment to steal over the face of my fair partner as she tried in vain to elicit the cause of the change. My male friends had many a hearty laugh at what they termed my absurd scrupulosity; but though they checked my confidences towards themselves, they never eradicated the opinion from my mind, that a man should belong to one world or to the other; and that, if low company, low haunts, and low conversation are adequate to afford him satisfaction, he has no right to mix amongst those to whom the thought of such scenes alone is contamination. These are new ideas, perhaps, to emanate from a man's pen; I do not say that I acted up to this doctrine; I simply affirm that my heart upheld it, and that the persuasion rendered me less free in the society of well-born women than I should other-

wise have been. I never alluded before them to the influence which beauty is supposed to exercise over the rougher portion of mankind, but I felt as if their glances were intended to search into my soul and question why, since their charms possessed so much power, they were not sufficient for my pleasure, and the pleasure of such as myself.

CHAPTER IV.

BEATRICE was very anxious that Emmeline should come to town for part of the season; and knowing that she would not care to stay in so gay a house as her own, tried to persuade me to invite her to Brook Street. But this I refused to do. I excused my conduct to my sister on the ground that the presence of a lady in my establishment would prove an obstacle to all my bachelor entertainments, and that I was pledged too deeply to put a stop to them; but my real reason was very different. It would have given me greater uneasiness to see Emmeline accept, for any length of time, the hospitality of either Beatrice or Gertrude, and mix in the continual round of gaiety which was their life.

I had sounded her on the subject; I knew

that she was perfectly contented down at Grasslands with her husband and child, and had no wish to enter into the dissipations of which she heard so much. I loved to think of her in her happiness and innocence, engaged in teaching little Ethel, or riding round the farm with Talbot, or reading aloud to Marguerite; and to know that whenever I was sick to death of the turmoil which surrounded me, I had but to run down to Grasslands to breathe a purer atmosphere, physical and moral.

Was it all selfishness in me to wish to keep my sister untainted by the frivolities of a London season; to preserve the freshness of her heart, the simplicity of her nature, the activity of her love, in its full force?

Emmeline had always appeared to me something better than the rest of us; and not to me only: my father, although he had been as proud as Lucifer of the beauty of the other two, had felt the loss of neither of them so long as she was with him in his sickness; and my mother, however bitter the mention of her titled sons-in-law made her, had never a word to say against this gentlest of her daughters or the husband of

her choice. Beatrice and Gertrude were not less pure by nature than their sister; but the education of their maturity had brushed all the bloom from their minds, whilst she retained the guilelessness of hers. Emmeline would have listened with the greatest complacency to a story which would have dyed the cheeks of Beatrice with scarlet, and caused Gertrude to purse up her mouth to a degree of fabulous minuteness, whilst the tell-tale flash from her eyes revealed that she understood the *double entendre* which it was intended to convey. In fact, my elder sisters were women of the world; they had been often deceived where they had trusted, and mistaken where they believed, and the consequence was that, in judging others, they were no longer apt to err upon the softer side. Emmeline had gone almost from the altar to the backwoods, and had never had an opportunity since her marriage of becoming polluted by the society of women worse than herself. For here leaks out the secret of many a pure girl's initiation into the knowledge of wrong. Few men would be base enough to teach it her; they are too soiled themselves not to reverence innocence when they

see it; and the first endeavour of a true-hearted man is to preserve it, even mentally, to the woman he admires; besides, they have not the opportunities of the other sex. It is from women, women who go through society, frequenting the best houses, receiving the most honoured of their sex, shaking hands with the youngest and the purest, but who know only too well that were the secrets of all hearts to be revealed, their path would lie beyond the pale, that our sisters and our daughters receive their most dangerous lessons.

"I hold that man the worst of public foes,
Who, either for his own or children's sakes,
To save his blood from scandal, lets the wife
Whom he knows false abide and rule the house:
For, being through his cowardice allow'd
Her station, taken everywhere for pure,
She like a new disease, unknown to men,
Creeps, no precaution used, among the crowd."

From such companions I was only too glad to think that Emmeline was preserved, and I strenuously opposed all the efforts of her sisters to entice her to take up her temporary residence amongst us. She wrote to me frequently, and every letter proved how perfectly happy she was in her country life, and how circumstances,

which most people would have thought trivial, had the power to make her heart well over with innocent pleasure. Now it was that Ethel had had her first riding-lesson on the miniature pony which I had picked up for her, and looked so pretty in her little habit and tasselled cap (photograph in costume enclosed by fond mother), and had not been at all frightened; then, that Marguerite's new invalid chair, by which she could be drawn out into the garden, suited admirably, and did not jolt her in the least, even over the gravel; anon, because a commission, with which Talbot had entrusted me, had come to hand, and was "perfect, just what we wanted; and you really are the dearest boy not to mind trouble," &c., &c.

In fact, to please Emmeline it was but necessary to remember other people: however gratified she might appear at receiving a present for herself, it never called forth corresponding thanks. One day she wrote, enclosing a letter which had arrived for me at Grasslands: "a suspicious enclosure," as she impertinently called it, "and not looking at all as if it had come from a gentleman." I took up the forwarded com-

munication and examined it; it certainly *did* look suspicious, being written on thin pink paper with lines running across it, enclosed in a long envelope, and directed in an uncertain female hand. My curiosity was roused to ascertain who could have addressed me at Grasslands, a place from which I had been absent for two years, and to which I had only returned on a flying visit; and my first glance at the inside of the missive helped me little.

"5, *Belleville Crescent, Marlborough Circus, Islington.*"

"Who the devil can live at Belleville Crescent, Marlborough Circus, Islington?" I inwardly ejaculated, and turning to the scratchy signature I saw transcribed what I took for "A. Shannon." The name was quite unfamiliar to me; but I was used to receiving appeals for the loan of small sums from that half of the creation which no man can refuse; and so I concluded with a sigh, that I was "in" for another five-pound note, and returned to the commencement of the letter.

"5, *Belleville Crescent,*
"*Marlborough Circus, Islington.*

"DEAR SIR,

"Hearing that you have returned to Grasslands, mamma desires me to write, and beg, that if not troubling too much, you will have the goodness to call at the above address, as Mrs. Sherman ("*Grasslands, Sherman,*" I mentally exclaimed, "Good heavens! what can the people want with me?" and then the remembrance of my plantation wooings dawned upon my mind, and I began to laugh so heartily that it was some minutes before I could proceed with the epistle of my fair correspondent)—"as Mrs. Sherman has something of yours by her, and would wish to make a communication respecting it in person. If you should be coming to London shortly, any day will be convenient to mamma as she never goes out, having enjoyed bad health since Mr. Sherman treated her so badly, going to Amerika with all our things and leaving us alone, Adelaide being married some time ago. Hoping this will find you well,

"Yours sincerely,

"J. SHERMAN."

The little Julia, of course; how could I have forgotten her? and yet, when I came to think of it, I had forgotten her entirely. The miserable event which had followed so quickly on my last interview with the family, and the stirring, active life which I had since led, had effectually obliterated all memory of the blue-eyed girls with whom I had frittered away so many half-hours; not only that, but the various scenes of excitement through which I had passed since that time, and the crowds of pretty women I had seen and made love to, had expurgated all desire to meet my country fascinators again.

My first impulse upon finishing Miss Julia's letter was to take no notice of it: I was not at Grasslands, and she might imagine it had never reached me: but on further consideration I abandoned the idea as unmanly. I was aided to this resolve by the knowledge that the bullet-headed gentleman with the creamy voice had deserted them; if he had been in Belleville Crescent no earthly power should have dragged me there, I disliked the remembrance of him too much; but the thought of the women being alone, and probably in distress, robbed my assent

to their request of half the repugnance I felt in the prospect of fulfilling it. Besides, I was curious to know what property of mine could possibly have fallen into Mrs. Sherman's hands, and what she could have to say on the subject which might not be written: these considerations, mingled with a revived recollection of how pretty Julia had been at seventeen, and how, in all probability, she would be much more so at her present age, made me decide to drive over to Islington the first afternoon I could spare time to do so. I had really no feelings connected with the enterprise beyond a little curiosity, and a spark of that chivalry which I trust will never cease to be kindled in my breast at the call of any woman, be her age or station what it may.

At the same time I made no secret of my proposed visit to the men of my acquaintance; there was nothing in Julia Sherman's letter to render showing it a breach of confidence, and I usually produced it, after having given the history of my double flirtation, as evidence of my good faith, challenging my bachelor friends to do the business for me, and go as

my ambassador to Mrs. Sherman's *levée*. Many and many a time did I put off the expedition, my indifference on the subject making me believe that it was really necessary for me to be in the opposite direction; and when at last, some ten days after the receipt of the note, I jumped into my cab with the sole intention of going to Belleville Crescent, I thought it about as great a nuisance as anything that I had ever done. I do not relate my feelings on this matter as any extenuation for the events which followed it: I simply note down what occurred. I am now approaching an epoch in my existence which I would gladly not record; but were I to shirk doing so I should not only be an unfaithful biographer, but in endeavouring to hide some of my faults I should be concealing the only excuse which I have for the committal of others, which, if not worse in themselves, had the most fatal effect upon the happiness of my life. I will attempt to relate this part of my history as briefly as possible; and should any of my readers be inclined to assert that it had been best omitted, I would ask them to suspend their judgment until they have seen how intimately it affected

each subsequent action of my life, and trust me that if it had not been absolutely necessary, the story should never have been told.

Belleville Crescent was a row of not bad-looking houses, each of which appeared to be inhabited by several families; for as my cab stopped at No. 3, a monthly nurse (as I saw by the card in the window) popped out her head from the dining-room, three children with dirty faces peered from the area, and a man with lathered chin and razor held in hand glanced over a tumbled blind from one of the top stories. What is called, in lodging-house parlance, the "drawing-room floor" was the only window unoccupied, and there I concluded I should find the people I was in search of. I was rather nervous as I knocked at the door, lest the surrounding neighbours should suspect me, as they did Pecksniff, of having come post-haste for the monthly nurse, and nearly fell back from the steps when I found that she had answered my summons.

"It's not Mrs. Baines you're wanting, sir?" she inquired, in the mildest of voices, and totally unlike the determined accents of the famous Gamp.

"No; a Mrs. Sherman,—does she live here?"

"On the drawing-room floor, sir; one above this. You had better step up; the lady don't move about much."

I "stepped up" accordingly, and knocked at the door, which was answered by an invitation to enter. When I did so I found Mrs. Sherman alone, extended on a sofa. I have never been able, from that day to this, to ascertain if she was really ill, or only shamming; but I strongly suspect it was a little of the latter mixed with a spice of laziness. She had always been a nerveless, indolent woman, and since the defection of her husband had taken credit for being in too delicate health to make any exertion, and been well satisfied to lie on the sofa all day, and be supported by her daughter. So much I discovered for myself; the rest of their history Mrs. Sherman now related to me. Her tale was a long-drawn-out and pitiful one, to which I had to listen with looks of forced interest, and such ejaculatory sentences as "Indeed!" "I am very grieved to hear it!" "How shocking!" "How very sad!" &c., wishing all the while that either the daughter

would make her appearance, or the mother would stop her whining.

But Julia was not at home, and Mrs. Sherman whined on. They had been so comfortably settled at Grasslands, and Mr. Sherman was doing so good a business amongst the surrounding gentry, when one day, without so much as by your leave or with your leave, he had gone away to "the Americas," taking everything of value in the house, "even to the pretty trinkets you gave my dear girls, Mr. Estcourt, and which they valued above everything they possessed."

"And have you never heard from your husband since, Mrs. Sherman?" I inquired.

"*Never*, sir, and I trust I never shall—it's a painful subject—we have reasons to believe that Mr. S. was not quite unaccompanied in his flight"—and here Mrs. Sherman looked down, and fingered the strings of her cap.

I said I was very sorry to hear it, and then an awkward silence ensued, until I remarked—

"And so Adelaide is married, Mrs. Sherman." A faint flush rose to the woman's faded cheek as she answered hesitatingly, "Yes, she is married, Mr. Estcourt."

"Well, I trust."

"Yes, very well. Her gentleman is a wealthy person residing in the country, but I have not seen my daughter now for some time."

"And Julia is with you still?"

"Oh, yes; I couldn't part with Julia. She is employed out during the day in a large millinery establishment at the West End. Nothing ungenteel, Mr. Estcourt; I couldn't allow my daughter to take any but the genteelest employment. Her only business is in the fitting-on room, where a figure like hers can be turned to advantage. I expect her home shortly; she is generally in by six."

"And your business with me, Mrs. Sherman? We must not forget that, for I am rather pressed for time."

"Oh, you won't refuse to sit a minute, surely, Mr. Estcourt. The last evening we had the pleasure of seeing you in Dorsetshire Terrace" (ay, and the first, too, I thought to myself) "you were so obliging as to commission the late Mr. S. (for I cannot bring myself to speak of that bad man as if he lived) to paint you a picture of the Hall; and he took the greatest of

trouble, I believe, to comply with your wishes, but when it was finished you had left England, when of course it could not be sent after you. That picture I have by me now; for his paintings were the only things which Mr. Sherman left behind him, being too bulky, I presume, to be of any use to him. Of course, Mr. Estcourt, you need not purchase the picture unless you choose; still, a commission is a commission, sir, and I think it would hang nicely on your walls at Grasslands. But that is for you to decide."

Of course I said I should be only too happy to pay for the possession of the work of art, and desired Mrs. Sherman to let me know at once how much I was in her debt. She wished me to examine the painting first, but this I felt to be quite unnecessary, particularly as it was packed away in a loft, and could not be procured until Julia came home. All that I wished was to cancel the obligation I was under, and she could send the picture to Brook Street at her convenience. After a good deal of "humming" and "hawing," and saying she must leave the price to me, and I could give just what I pleased, &c., and that she would have been happy to

present me with the painting as a remembrance of Grasslands, if the late Mr. S. had not left Julia and herself to their own resources, Mrs. Sherman settled the knotty question by naming the modest sum of ten pounds for a work which if placed on a signboard had not fetched one, and for which my servant subsequently, on being desired to hang it up in his pantry, almost gave warning. However, ten pounds was not much to me; and before the words had hardly left Mrs. Sherman's lips, a note for that amount was transferred from my purse to hers. She then became so profuse in her thanks that I was meditating instant flight, when a light footstep on the stairs was followed by the entrance of Julia. As I rose to greet her, I was astonished at the improvement in her appearance. She had grown taller and slighter; and the rusticity of her beauty had given place to an air of positive refinement. Her eyes were as blue and as big as ever, her hair as flaxen and luxuriant; and, whether from the heat of the afternoon, or the little excitement consequent on finding me in Belleville Crescent, her cheeks were flushed to the soft tinge of rose-leaves.

She was stylishly dressed also, as became a young "lady" from a West-End millinery establishment, and the attire set off her face as well as her figure. I found her exceedingly shy however; her bashfulness appeared so great that she could hardly answer my inquiries for blushing, and yet she contrived to imbue me with the idea that to meet me again had been the first object of her life. I did not stay long after her arrival, as I had engagements nearer home; but as I gathered up the reins of my cab-horse, rather impatient at the number of strange eyes which were watching my departure, a flutter of the curtain on the drawing-room floor incited me to give another glance upwards, when I caught the eyes of Julia Sherman apparently fixed upon me. As soon as I moved my head, however, she retreated in confusion, and in another minute I was whirling off to the West End. As I recall this part of my life, I turn over the contents of an *escritoire*, and there, amongst faded ribbons, withered flowers, mateless gloves, and old *billets-doux*, I find the following little notes, the first of which reached me two days after my visit to Islington.

"*June 24th.*

"I must write to thank you for your great goodness to us. I did not know it when I met you yesterday, or I should not have been able to hold my tongue quiet. Mamma desires me to say that we send the picture to-day to the address which you left us, and she hopes you will like it. It is just like the *dear* Hall, but I suppose you have forgotten all about that —I mean the time when you and I was there together.

"Yours, sincerely,

"JULIA SHERMAN."

(2.)

"*June 30th.*

"DEAR MR. ESTCOURT,

"You never wrote to say if the picture arrived quite safely—it went by Parcels Delivery. Perhaps you do not wish to write to me now that you are such a rich gentleman, and such a great difference between us. If so, it would have been best if we had never seen you again. But I dare say you have so many frends that you have no time to think of mamma or me.

"Your affectionate frend,

"JULIA SHERMAN."

To this note I returned a short answer, acknowledging the receipt of the picture, and denying that anything but press of business had prevented my doing so before. By return of post arrived the following:

(3.)

"*July* 1*st.*

"Why do you write so cold? You used always to call me Juli, and now I am only Miss Sherman. Is it anything I have done, or you have heard of me that has changed you? Or is it because papa has behaved so disgraceful to us? Anyway it seems hard to me; I had a good cry over your letter of last night.

"Yours affectionately,

"JULIA."

And a week later:—

(4.)

"*July* 8*th.*

"I have been expecting a letter from you every day. You are *very* cruel. What has poor Juli done that it is too much trouble even to write to her? Have you forgotten all our walks and talks at Grasslands? I wish I had—but I cannot do it, and I shall never be happy again all my life—I wish I was dead.—JULIA."

I had been thinking of writing to her again, until the last note reached me, and then I decided it would be folly to do so. The girl was evidently half educated and wholly foolish; and I should only be the means of dragging us both into a scrape if I pandered to her romantic nonsense. So I was stoically silent under a perfect battery of little love-letters, breathing nothing but reproach, which Julia Sherman fired at me, day after day; until one morning when I received an excited letter from her, entreating me to go to their aid, as the bailiffs had been put into their rooms for debt, and every article of furniture was about to be seized from under them. I went off to Belleville Crescent at once, and released them from their difficulty; and notwithstanding all my virtuous inclinations I cannot say that I was displeased with the effusive demonstrations of gratitude displayed by Julia for my benefit. She clung to me and hung about me in a manner which would have been very delightful for any man, and especially for one who wrote himself down heartwhole.

"You'll come again," she whispered, as I prepared to leave them; "you will not desert

us, will you?" and although the very atmosphere of Belleville Crescent was obnoxious to me, I could not but make a half promise to comply with her request. I did not redeem it, however, notwithstanding that the battery of notes was again opened upon me, and their language became more and more unmistakeable.

I was not in the habit of using my own horses at night, and one evening as I turned out of Brook Street about eight o'clock in search of a cab, to my intense surprise I ran up against Julia Sherman, who was loitering on the pavement outside my house.

"Good heavens, Julia!" I exclaimed, "what are you doing here? you're a great deal too pretty, my dear girl, to go about in the evenings by yourself. Who are you waiting for?"

"I was only looking at the house," she answered. "Oh, Mr. Estcourt, you are so unkind to me, you never answer my letters; you are breaking my heart"—and at this juncture she commenced to cry, and there was nothing to be done but to call a cab and take her home. On the way I believe I tried to philosophize a little, and to reason her out of her fancy for me. I

know that, however flattered I may have felt by her avowed preference, I thought the whole affair great folly, and foresaw that it might end in trouble for both of us. But there are very few men whose vanity is proof against a woman's confession of love, whether real or feigned. I fear we often are most utterly defeated, when we imagine we have just conquered. I tried to play the Mentor to Julia Sherman; to point out to her how utterly futile it would be for us to love each other; to make her understand (however much the effort cost myself) that on account of my position I should be forced to look else where for a wife. I salved over the harshest parts of my plain speaking, by telling her how flattered I felt by her affection, and how little I was worthy of it; with many other such commonplaces, which if not strictly true I should have been a brute not to make use of. Still, though I spoke out boldly, and meant each word I said, I was not yet four-and-twenty, and it was a hard task for me to feel the girl's arms clinging round me in the shelter of the cab, and to hear her continuous sobbing without attempting some more practical comfort than mere words

could convey. But so far I take credit to myself; I seemed to foreknow what would eventually come upon us both, and feared to take a single step which should anticipate my fate. So I parted from Julia Sherman with a pressure of the hand, and an assurance, in answer to her whispered entreaty, that nothing had passed but what had raised her in my eyes—God forgive me!

I have promised to be brief, and I will fulfil my word. My philosophical lecture had not the effect upon Miss Sherman that I had anticipated. I continued to meet her, at times and in places when I least expected to do so, and I continued to receive periodically from her pen torrents of reproaches and upbraidings for my cruelty and coldness of heart. Still, I was firm in defending her from the danger which she courted, until one day, regardless of appearance, she rushed into my rooms in Brook Street, clothed in deep mourning, and throwing herself at my feet, declared, amidst sobs, that her mother was dead; her poor dear mother had gone from her for ever; and that she had no money and no credit; and no one to look to but

myself in all the world. Shocked at her statements and display of grief, I hastened to raise her from the attitude she had assumed, and assure her of my sympathy and willing aid.

"But what had become of her engagement at the West End," I inquired. The pay which had been sufficient to support two, would of course suffice for one. But Miss Sherman informed me that that was another of her misfortunes. A letter, one of her letters,—she said with becoming hesitation,—had been seen and read, and thereupon she had received a summary dismissal from the head of the establishment.

"It was a note I should not have left about," she added timidly: "I can't think how it happened; it must have dropped from the bosom of my dress: it was—in fact it was yours, Mr. Estcourt, and Miss Grindlay said she would have no one about her place who received letters from gentlemen. And so I lost my situation, and I don't suppose she will give me a character, and—and—I'm ruined by it," she said, relapsing into a fresh burst of tears.

Of course I was indignant; the fact of the mere possession of a letter (and especially a

letter of my own, which had been preserved for weeks, and carried next to the heart of its recipient) proving the cause of so summary a dismissal was an unheard-of case. I considered Miss Grindlay's conduct unjustifiable—in fact, infamous. I was for going post-haste to the millinery establishment itself, and engaging in a "round" with its worthy proprietress. But this design Miss Sherman begged me to forego. It would be of no use, she averred, and only the cause of further humiliation to herself. I tried to comfort her with the assurance that situations were not so difficult to procure; that a little influence went a long way; and that I would spare neither money nor pains to get her another. But my proposal did not meet with the approval I anticipated. "I cannot toil on alone," she said plaintively; "it was all very well whilst my dear mother was spared to me; there was some object in working; but now everything is so sadly changed. It is not a week since I buried her, and I have managed, by the sale of our effects, to pay everything she owed, as well as the funeral expenses; but now that is over I have no heart for any further effort."

I suggested something about her married sister being able to receive her, but she refuted the idea with scorn.

"Adelaide and I have not spoken for ever so long," she said; "I would die sooner than apply to her."

"But how are you to live, Julia?" I asked with unaffected curiosity.

"I don't know," she replied, "and I don't care; go to the workhouse, I suppose, or die in the streets: it will be all one to me, unless,——" and here she turned her large blue eyes full upon me,—"unless, Mr. Estcourt, you will let me stay here."

Whether it pleased or no, her proposal startled me, and I spent a whole hour trying to reason her out of the idea. I represented to her plainly, how dire the consequences of such a proceeding must prove, not for myself, but for her: I promised to support her in comfort and respectability if she would only consent so to live; to be her friend till death if she would not urge me to take advantage of her friendlessness. But my words of wisdom were all lost upon her: her eyes streamed with tears: her

hands were alternately clasped and clenched: she played off all the persuasive graces of woman when she implores; all the pretty pantomime of woman when she is slighted; until she and a very powerful feeling called Vanity (of which I have ever had too much to be a hero) gained the day. In one word, Julia Sherman threw herself upon my protection, and from that hour lived under it.

Stern moralists will doubtless blame the action, but I was not a moralist at that period, and I saw no other course open to me. If I had loved the girl, it might have served as a palliative for the deed; but if I had loved her, I most assuredly should never have accepted her offer, and I believed that the shelter afforded her by my roof, at least, left Julia Sherman no excuse to join the God-forsaken thousands who roam our city every night. But let no one mistake the case for one of heartless seduction.

From that worst of venial errors, which ruthlessly culling all the blooming promise of a young life, leaves nothing but blasted and arid plains behind, I hold myself, both in deed and purpose, entirely free.

CHAPTER V.

Two circumstances, occurring before the close of the season, were subjects of great annoyance to me. The first was, my discovery that the issue of the events related in the last chapter had become patent, heaven knows how, to my sisters Beatrice and Gertrude.

"Oh! yes, Master Gerald!" exclaimed the latter one day, with a would-be mysterious air, "*we* know the reason that you wouldn't invite poor Emmy to stay with you in Brook Street. You are determined to prevent your sisters ever taking you by surprise, that's very clear; only I think you might have thought of a less expensive method for effectually barricading your fortress against the presence of ladies."

"What do you mean?" I said, although I

had already guessed it from her manner; "you are welcome to come to Brook Street whenever you choose: there is no reason that you should not do so" (as indeed there was not). But her words had discomposed me, and I felt that I changed colour.

"Just listen to Gerald, Beatrice," continued my vivacious sister; "he invites us to lunch with him in Brook Street to-morrow; will you be one of the party?"

Beatrice looked up from her work in solemn surprise, and regarded me fixedly.

"Is this true, Gerald?"

"*True!* what are you driving at?" I said testily.

"That we can go to see you in Brook Street?"

"Of course! what is to hinder you?"

"Only that we heard that you had increased your establishment more than is absolutely necessary for your requirements," and she bent her eyes again upon her work as she concluded.

"Well, then, you've heard wrong," I rejoined hotly; "I keep no more servants than are wanted for the size of the house."

"And you are incurring no needless expenses elsewhere, I hope?" she continued quietly. I

was terribly tempted to swear, but I only answered:

"What possible concern can that be of yours, Beatrice?"

"It's no good being angry about it, my dear boy," she replied. "I do not expect you to be different from other people, only I do trust you will be careful and not become entangled in any way. I am a dozen years older than you are, remember; and I've seen a good deal of the world, so I feel I have a right to caution you. These little affairs are all very well in their way I suppose, as long as they don't go too far, but many a man has been ruined by them before now. I am very glad, however, to hear that you have had the sense not to spoil the letting of the house in Brook Street."

As my sister proceeded thus calmly, I was standing at one of the windows, with my back towards her, chafing under her warning, biting my lips, changing my feet, and wondering who the devil could have enlightened her in this manner as to my private affairs. Her voice ceased, and the mocking tones of Gertrude next took up the strain.

"Look at him, Beatrice, staring out of the window; he dare not look us in the face. Isn't he the picture of a naughty boy? Ah! you think we know *nothing*, Master Jerry; we poor women have no eyes or ears, have we? or sense either, for the matter of that; but we make the best use of what heaven has given us at all events."

"*Think!*" I exclaimed angrily, leaving my position by the window,—"I think you are *all* eyes and *all* ears,—and hear and see a great deal more than ever takes place. Pray who told you this confounded story about my doings in Brook Street?"

"It was repeated to us in confidence," replied Beatrice gently.

"Now! was he in a rage because he was found out, the dear old poppet!" said Gertrude, shaking her head in the most provoking manner; "and did he think his sisters were going to give up their authority to be torn in pieces by an angry British lion?"

"Gertrude, for God's sake do try to talk sense. Beatrice, I must beg you won't repeat any of this folly down at Grasslands; Emmeline is not quite so *au fait* at discussing scandal as

you and Gerty are, and I might not be able to enter on an explanation with her."

"Which you have done with us most fully," interposed Gertrude, who did not like the rebuke I had given her.

"I do not see that Gerald is in the least bound to give us an explanation, Gerty," remarked my elder sister, "and I think you were foolish to introduce the subject. As you had done so, I felt tempted to give him a little caution, but I am very sorry if I have offended him. Do not let us say any more about it, Jerry; of course it is no business of ours."

"I should think not," I answered bluntly, but I felt that the discussion left me at a disadvantage, and that they knew almost as much about me as I did myself.

The other event to which I have alluded, as causing me annoyance, took place but two days before I left town for Grasslands. I had been to a large pic-nic at Richmond, which was to end with a dance, but I contracted such a violent headache from the combined effects of a glaring sun and inferior champagne, that I decided not to wait for the evening's amusement,

and found my way home by myself. As I strolled along a street not far from the one in which my house was situated, I came suddenly upon the figure of——Mrs. Sherman. I had so thoroughly believed in the death of this woman; placed such confidence in her daughter's accounts of her illness, her painful demise, and the expenses of her funeral, that her appearance was really like a resurrection from the dead to me. At first I could hardly speak to her, and her only desire seemed to be to elude my notice; but in a moment, all the deceit which had been practised on me flashed on my mind, and I grasped her unwilling arm.

"What are you doing here?" I exclaimed. "Is it by your design, or Julia's, that she has represented you to me as dead—that she has represented herself to be left without a friend or a home?"

She trembled so violently that she could not answer me, and I was so indignant that I would not give her time to collect herself.

"Wretched woman," I said, "it is not possible that you can have pandered to your daughter's disgrace! Come back with me; I

must confront you with one another. I will have a full explanation of this before we part."

The scene which ensued was a miserable one. The women accused each other of being the originator of the scheme, of which I certainly now appeared to be the victim; the daughter, of course, excused her assent, and all the consequent falsehoods, on the score of her love for myself; the mother pleaded her utter inability to control Julia when she had once set her heart upon a thing, and the upshot of their arguments proved nothing but that I had been regularly duped, and I began to doubt whether the feelings had not been assumed, as well as the pretence for their indulgence. Disgusted with the whole affair, I peremptorily dismissed Mrs. Sherman, forbidding her to appear under any roof for the rent of which I was liable, or to hold any communication (under present circumstances) with her daughter. She whined fearfully at my decree, saying it was very hard she should be entirely parted from her child, and that she had often told Julia that poverty was no evil so long as it was accompanied by virtue; and to think that Mr. S. should have

deserted her, and her dear girls into the bargain, and that she was left to die alone. This was all very pathetic, but I was firm. I could not help regarding the part this woman must have played in the farce acted for my benefit as infinitely worse than that of her daughter. I felt no pity for her, no compassion; the very sight of her faded, hypocritical face was repugnant to me; and if Julia had insisted upon being allowed to see her mother I should have sent them both forth together.

But this little episode made me decide to leave town earlier than I had originally intended. I had received invitations to pass the autumn months at the country houses of Lord Portsdowne, the Lyndons, and the Claremonts; but an irresistible impulse took me down to Grasslands. I was sick and wearied of the artificial life by which I was surrounded, and longed to breathe a less demoralizing atmosphere; and as the train bore me every minute further from the dusty, smoke-dried town, into the green heart of Dorsetshire, I felt a new man. The sight of the apple-orchards by which we rushed, their trees weighed to the ground with rosy wealth;

of the various dells, sunless and cool, with a carpet of fallen cones, from which graceful ferns and nodding foxgloves upreared their verdant heads; of the wide-spreading pastures, scattered over with grazing cattle; appealed to my senses as it had never done before. The freshness and the quiet of the country struck me, for the first time, as something necessary to my enjoyment; and as Emmeline drove me home from the station in her little basket carriage, I leaned back, quite at my ease, and thought how pleasant it would be to be driven through shady lanes and past cowslip-scented meadows for ever. The air was laden with sweet smells, the breath of cows, the hedges full of honeysuckle and wild roses; the fields of rich grass or waving corn, all seemed to add their *quota* to the general fragrance, until a languid dreamy influence stole over me, and Emmeline taxed me with want of communicativeness.

"Here have we been separated for more than three months, Gerald, and you have not a word to tell me of all you have been about."

"My dear child," I answered, "that is just what I have come down here to forget. Pray

drop the subject of bricks and mortar altogether, and let us talk of nothing but buttercups and daisies during my stay at Grasslands. Tell me all about Marguerite and Ethel, the pigs, the stock and the poultry; but if you want information about operas, or balls, or dinner-parties, appeal to Beatrice or Gertrude, for I'm sick of every one of them. Figuratively speaking, I've brought down my slippers with me and don't intend to put on my dress boots till I go back again."

But although I was most anxious to keep thus quiet, the kindness of those families which had ranked themselves amongst my father's friends would not permit me to carry out my intention: and day after day, Emmy would laughingly display the cards which had been left upon me during my rambles, by the gentlemen of the various *ménages*, maliciously triumphing in the knowledge that I should be forced into society whether I would or no. One evening, on the return of Talbot and myself from a long ride across country, she came dancing into the hall to meet us, with six visiting cards held aloft in her hand.

"See!" she exclaimed, "what an honour you have brought upon us! The county member and his family, who have never thought of calling upon Colonel and Mrs. Talbot, bear down in full force as the master of Grasslands makes his appearance. Here they all are, Gerald. Lady Grafton, Sir Phillimore Grafton, Miss Grafton, Miss Ellen Grafton, Mr. Eustace Grafton, and two extra cards from the gentlemen for your especial benefit. What do you think of that? Oh! you naughty boy, don't swear!"

I am afraid there was some cause for Emmeline's last injunction. It was infinitely annoying to me, when I had calculated on a few months' perfect freedom, to find I was not my own master, but must stay to consider, before I laid a plan, whether courtesy did not demand my riding ten miles in one direction or fifteen in the other, to return the formal call of people for whose acquaintance I had not the least desire. Sir Phillimore Grafton had succeeded my father as member for Dorsetshire, and lived at a place called Lee, which lay between Grasslands and Wiversdale, and where in due course, in

company with my sister, I returned the civility he had paid us, and found the family pleasant and hospitable but old-fashioned. Sir Phillimore looked more like a respectable farmer than a member of Parliament, and Lady Grafton was a helpmeet for him; the daughters were amiable but commonplace, the sons the same, and altogether I decided that one visit to Lee would suffice me a lifetime, though my sister voted me very uncharitable, and declared she had found them charming.

I reminded her that one man's meat is often another man's poison; but she maintained it was the morning call which had disgusted me; that I should have displayed a much better temper after stretching my legs under Sir Phillimore's mahogany, and tasting his crusty old port; that the only thing men ever cared for was a good dinner; and she believed all my talk about buttercups and daisies was sheer affectation.

I bore her reproaches in the spirit of martyrdom with which I was ever used to submit myself to my petty tyrants, even tacitly consenting to be written down a *gourmand*; notwithstanding which Mrs. Talbot had a great

deal of trouble, about ten days afterwards, in making me agree to send an answer in the affirmative to an invitation to dinner which had arrived for us all from Lady Grafton.

"My *dear* Emmeline," I remember saying on that occasion, "I positively can *not* undergo a whole evening at Lee. Just fancy to yourself what it will be, with the old man twaddling at the dinner-table, and the old woman twaddling upstairs; and 'She wore a wreath of roses' from one of the Miss Graftons, and then a drive of seven miles home at ten o'clock."

My sister burst out laughing at the pathos of my description. "Well! you won't hear them all at once, Jerry, and if you are with the old man at the dinner-table, it is certain you cannot be with the old woman upstairs; she will fall to my share. Besides, there will doubtless be other company; and they seem such kind people, that I dare say they have got up this party chiefly on your account; what do you say, Walter?" (this to her husband).

But Talbot would not commit himself by an opinion. He only shook his head and laughed.

"If you and Gerald go, Emmy, my dear, I'll

go too; and if you stay at home, why—I think I shall stay at home."

"Oh! you stupid old thing!" exclaimed his wife; "I believe you are secretly in league with Gerald, and will strengthen him in his persuasion as soon as my back is turned, so I shall not leave him until he has decided what answer I am to send to Lady Grafton."

"Now, Emmy, what will be the use of going?" I asked, commencing to argue the matter.

"What will be the use of *not* going?" she said in return.

"There will be several uses, or rather gains. In the first place, comfort: in the second, a good pipe."

"Selfish, of course! but cannot you have a cigar there?"

"Thirdly, quiet: fourthly, freedom from the obligation of making oneself agreeable."

"An obligation which I expect you find rather difficult to put in force," interposed my sister pertly.

"Fifthly"—I was continuing, when she laid her hand on my mouth.

"Fifthly—you are just like all other men, and won't do as you are asked."

"Well! let me hear your arguments in favour of an opposite decision!"

"Sir Phillimore was a friend of papa's."

"That's one white ball for your side, I allow."

"The old people are as kind as can be; and the Miss Graftons are very nice, and will most likely improve on acquaintance."

"Humph!—I can't quite agree with you there."

"I dare say you'll get a much better dinner than I shall give you at home."

"I am afraid that consideration would not weigh with me much, Emmy, notwithstanding you are so certain that an Englishman cares for nothing but his meals."

"Well! you may meet your fate there."

At this I could not restrain myself from laughing.

"My *fate*, you simpleton! I am my own fate, and were I not, I don't think I should seek her at Sir Phillimore Grafton's. However, I suppose this all means that I must go, whether I wish it or not: so you can write and accept for us all."

Emmeline said I was a "darling," and would

be rewarded for my virtue: I considered my assent in the light of a great weakness, and was only consoled by the idea that even country dinner parties did not last for ever.

At one time it seemed as if my reward had come before my sacrifice, for I was very nearly prevented from going altogether. On the afternoon of the day we were engaged to Lee, Emmeline and I had just returned from a stroll in the garden, when she slipped on the steps which led to the hall-door and strained her ankle. It was not a serious accident, and one which a few days' rest would probably set to rights, but she could not put her foot to the ground that evening, which of course precluded all idea of her going out to dinner. Talbot, who of late years had quite given up the habit of going into society, and who appeared only too pleased to get off the present engagement, immediately expressed his intention of staying with his wife, and I thought it an admirable opportunity for displaying my fraternal affection by remaining at home also. The face of Emmeline, when we announced to her our joint determination, was a study.

"What! *both* of you?" she exclaimed, looking

from one to the other in positive distress. "Oh! this will never do! What would the Graftons think? You could not make a greater fuss if I were dangerously ill. Pray go, Walter; Marguerite and I will be capital company for each other, and I shall retire early to bed."

"My dear, I could not think of such a thing," replied Talbot, with comical gravity.

"And my anxiety is too great to permit of my leaving home," I added, with equal solemnity.

"Now Gerald is only hocussing you, Emmy," said my brother-in-law, exposing my little weakness with needless severity. "There is no earthly reason why *he* should not go to Lee, but my case is very different."

"There is no reason why you should not both go," replied my sister decidedly; "but one of you certainly must, and it ought to be Gerald: he knows we were only asked because of himself."

I protested, and argued, and even entreated without any avail: Emmeline was firm in declaring that her sprained ankle had nothing whatever to do with my engagement to the Graftons, and for the honour of the family I was bound to keep it. *La langue des femmes est leur épée,*

et elles ne la laissent pas rouiller. As usual in such cases, when my adversary was of the softer sex, I went to the wall and proved amenable. Talbot was a tougher subject; all his wife's eloquence was wasted on him; and at seven o'clock I alighted at the seat of Sir Phillimore Grafton, alone. The company, a larger one than I had anticipated meeting, was already assembled when I arrived, and as I made apologies for the non-appearance of my sister and her husband, Lady Grafton's lamentations over Emmeline's accident were heard all over the room.

"Dear, dear, Mr. Estcourt, you don't mean to say so—strained her ankle? how very distressing! Sir Phillimore, you will be grieved to hear we are not to have the pleasure of Colonel and Mrs. Talbot's company to-night. Dear Mrs. Talbot has hurt her ankle" (everybody was "dear" with Lady Grafton after the first interview). "How did it happen, Mr. Estcourt? Slipped on the steps, you say? dear! dear! Poor thing, what a sad occurrence! I hope you sent for medical assistance. Did your dear sister assume the recumbent posture at once?

Ah! that was right! but I am truly sorry it should have happened; we were quite looking forward to meeting her again. This makes our second *contretemps* to-night. A dear young friend staying in the house has been suddenly attacked with pains in the head, and will be unable to join us at dinner, though I trust she may do so afterwards. Yes, so very distressing, you know, and so unexpected. Sings charmingly, but I am almost afraid we shall not hear her this evening: too great a tax perhaps—yes; such a sad disappointment for all. Quite ready, Sir Phillimore: Mr. Estcourt, will you take down my eldest daughter?"

Laden with Miss Grafton (who certainly seemed very good-natured, if talking of nothing but Emmeline's ankle during the whole of dinner-time could be taken in proof of the fact), I wended my way down the broad old-fashioned staircase of Lee, and into the sombrely-furnished dining-room, where the courses were as heavy as the plate, and the conversation as slow as the movements of the antiquated servants. Trying to escape from Emmeline's ankle, which I had worn to the very bone, my eyes wandered up

and down the long damask-covered table in order to find out of what stamp of people my feeding neighbours were composed. I saw at a glance they were just such as I might have expected to meet at the Graftons. Clergymen and their wives; rollicking country gentlemen; dowdy country spinsters; with here and there a solemn-looking youngster, or a raw-looking girl, to whom such dissipations were evidently few and far between and invested with due awe.

I tried to talk and make myself agreeable to Miss Grafton, but she had not been to town that season; and each familiar topic fell still-born from my mouth, whilst my sister's ankle invariably rose from its ashes, and a few more interesting particulars were extracted from me on that subject. I fear relief must almost have been depicted on my countenance as at last the ladies left the dining-room, and I drew my chair up to the table, and attempted to break the ice which had hitherto existed between myself and the man who sat next me. He was a frank, pleasant fellow of the name of Townshend, who proved to have been well known to my father; and in making his acquaintance I recovered my

spirits, and ceased to remember how I had been bored. Sir Phillimore Grafton conducted his after-dinner parties in the old-fashioned way, pledging his guests separately, and inducing them by every means in his power to sit long, and not to spare the wine. Most of the men then present were such as readily responded to his invitation; and having no inducement to do otherwise, I remained with them until they proposed an adjournment. It was past ten o'clock before we went upstairs; as we did so, the sound of singing was heard from the drawing-room, which consisted of two apartments, in the further of which was placed the piano. I entered the front one, and throwing myself on a chair by the side of my friend Miss Grafton, composed myself to silence until the song should be concluded. The singer was hid from my sight; but I was immediately attracted by the voice: a soft, rich contralto, without one harsh or rugged tone, in which the simple, native notes were being sung.

"Who is singing?" I demanded, in a low whisper, of Miss Grafton.

"A friend of ours," she returned, with the

same caution. "She was not at the dinner-table. She has been ill."

I then remembered the circumstance related to me by my hostess on my arrival, and concluded this lady must be the one she had mentioned.

"Her voice does not sound as if she were ill," I remarked.

"No; her head is better now."

"May I ask her name?"

"Mrs. Penryhn."

Hitherto our conversation had been conducted in the discreetest of whispers, but at this communication of Miss Grafton's I repeated aloud—

"*What* name did you say?"

"Mrs. Saville Penryhn: she was a Miss Rivers. She is an old friend of ours; we were at school together in Paris."

"Is her husband here?" I demanded quickly. A strange sensation was beginning to creep over me, and my voice sounded thick in my own ears. Miss Grafton's round eyes opened to their widest.

"Her husband, Mr. Estcourt? oh, dear no! she is a widow. Mr. Penryhn died more than a year ago."

Starting from my seat with a rapidity which, if she thought at all upon the subject, must have greatly astonished my amiable informant, I pressed forward to the curtained arch which divided the two apartments, and gazed once more upon the face of her who had been Ada Rivers.

CHAPTER VI.

AFTER a lapse of three years, during which I had been endeavouring to persuade myself that I had forgotten her! She had ceased singing, but was still seated at the piano, robed in a high white dress of some very thin material, the simplicity of which at once struck me; and as she sat with the full light upon her face, she appeared so little changed that Time melted into Nothingness, and there was a music in my ears as of summer waves breaking upon a shore of shingles. A film passed before my eyes as I gazed upon her; a tremulous action long unknown to me seemed to communicate itself to every nerve; above the confusion of tongues and the wild drawing-room applause I could have counted the beating of my heart. Had I

ever experienced such feelings before? Yes; once, and once only; years and years ago; at a little place called Freshwave; when I loved. By the very novelty of the almost forgotten sensation, I felt that, since we parted, no woman had had the power to stir me thus. Was the agitation I experienced at sight of her but the ghost of the powerful feeling I had conquered, invoked by a recollection of the past, or was it the enemy himself, who had been subdued but not annihilated, and now rose up to warn me of my danger? Scarcely had I had time, however, to feel surprise at the fact that her presence made me tremble, when she left the instrument and moved towards the spot where I was standing. As she advanced, she caught my eyes fixed upon her, and by the vivid blush which dyed her cheek, I saw that I was recognized.

"Am I quite forgotten, Mrs. Penryhn?" I stammered, as we met.

"Oh, no; not at all," she answered, hurriedly; and as she placed her hand in mine, her eyes for a moment flashed upon me and then sought the ground; "that is, you have not been long in England, have you?"

"Only a few months. I returned last April."

"Indeed!" With apparent uncertainty she was about to pass on, when she stopped again, and said, formally—

"I hope your sisters and the rest of your family are well."

"Quite so, thank you! I trust you have recovered from your headache."

"Oh, yes," nervously plucking at her glove.

"My dear Ada, you sang *charmingly*," now interposed the voice of Lady Grafton. "I am sure it is exceedingly good of you to have exerted yourself so, and after such a headache as you have had. I hope it will be none the worse for your kindness. Now, will you have a glass of wine, or a cup of coffee? Oh! you must take something after your exertions. Quite a treat, I'm sure, yes. We do not often hear such singing at Lee. Now, do sit down in the easy-chair and rest yourself; you must be quite fatigued, yes. Mr. Romsey, Mrs. Penryhn will take a glass of water; that bell. Thank you; thank you very much. Yes. We must take care of our dear friend, after all her efforts to amuse us. Mr. Clarke, will you fetch a footstool for Mrs.

Penryhn? Now, my dear Ada, I will hear no objections. I insist upon your resting yourself, or you may have a return of your headache, yes." And trying to look infinitely grateful under the weight of her obligations, Mrs. Penryhn suffered herself to be propped up before and behind, and made completely uncomfortable by the pressing attentions of her over-zealous hostess.

In the meanwhile I leaned against the side of the archway, with something very like depression stealing over my spirits. Her vacillating, uncertain manner, so unlike the composure with which she formerly behaved to me; the hurry of her words, which almost amounted to brusqueness, equally puzzled me. Had she an objection to meet me again? was the remembrance of my boldness at our last interview, of my perseverance in addressing her after she had requested me not to do so, unpleasant to her? and did she fear a renewal of attentions which she had regarded more in the light of an impertinence than an honour? I watched her for some time after she had been seated in state by Lady Grafton, but her head never turned my way by so much as an inch, and my eyes only rested on

the delicate line of her slender white throat, and the woven mass of brown hair by which it was surmounted. She was talking in a sufficiently lively manner with the man whom Lady Grafton had called by the name of Romsey, and seemed perfectly free from the nervous hesitation which she had evinced when addressing myself. I felt ruffled at the comparison, and abruptly leaving my position, again took up one by the side of Miss Grafton, who had wandered into the next room.

"What did he die of, Miss Grafton?"

Until she looked up in my face and laughed I had no idea how absurd I was making myself by permitting the train of thought which occupied my mind to burst forth in this manner without any previous explanation.

"Who, which, when, and how, Mr. Estcourt?" This was the sole attempt at vivacity ever known to issue from the lips of Miss Grafton, and Townshend told me afterwards that she had heard him say it a minute before.

"I must really beg your pardon," I observed in answer. "I should have premised that I was thinking of Mr. Penryhn."

"Did you know him?"

"No; but my father was intimate with her family."

"Then you have met Ada before."

"Yes; some years ago—prior to her marriage."

"How strange that she should not have mentioned it, for she knew you were coming to-night; and she was staying with us when you and Mrs. Talbot called the week before last."

"Indeed! but our personal acquaintance is slight, and of so remote a date, that I could scarcely have dared to hope that Mrs. Penryhn would remember me." Notwithstanding which assertion I felt stung to the quick by Miss Grafton's innocent revelations.

"And did you not even know that she was a widow?"

"No. I must have been in Spain at the time, when I interested myself very little about what occurred at home."

"He died very suddenly at his shooting-box in Wales, I do not know from what cause. Papa says he was a very imprudent young man, and none of us liked him much. I always wondered how Ada could have married him."

"And she has been very disconsolate since, I suppose."

"I don't think so," replied Miss Grafton, smiling. "You know she is a very honest, straightforward girl, and would disdain to use any pretence of feeling. She was very quiet at first, of course, but she seems all right again now. She never cared much about society, though."

"Where is Colonel Rivers living at present?"

"In Scotland, I think. His wife had some property left her there. Perhaps you know he married for the third time just before Ada did. The younger girls are all put to school."

Armed with this further information, I ventured after a while to creep away from the vicinity of Miss Grafton and approach that of Mrs. Penryhn. How all things seemed to change as I drew near her! The man Romsey had left her at last, and she was thoughtfully tearing to pieces a little bunch of flowers which she had worn in her waistband.

"How destructive you ladies are," I said, with a view to opening the conversation. She started slightly to find I was so close to her, and smiled as she replied—

"It is mischief found for idle hands to do. There is this excuse for destroying flowers, however, they soon fall to pieces of themselves if we do not help them to do so."

"Do you lay that flattering unction to your soul with regard to all your works of destruction, Mrs. Penryhn?"

She looked at me gravely. For the first time since our meeting I obtained a full view of her eyes. How large and clear and soft and womanly they were! And yet I fancied there was something gone from them since I had seen them last; something come into them which had not been there before. Yet the eyes which had gazed over the Channel waters had ever been full of thought.

"I hope I never intentionally destroy anything that is worthy of preservation, Mr. Estcourt."

"Not even a memory. Have you then forgotten Freshwave? It was a stupid little place, I allow, but I think its very freshness and simplicity entitle it to an occasional thought. I know I often think of it."

Again that vivid blush which had so startled me on her recognition of myself, but it was

the only answer she made to my inquiry. Fearing I had annoyed her by the allusion, I hastened to another subject.

"I hope my little friends Georgie and Flora and Louie are all quite well. Miss Grafton tells me they are at school."

She recovered herself immediately.

"Quite well, thank you, and growing such big girls: Georgina really promises to be very pretty, and we expect she will make quite a sensation on her *début*. I suppose the honour of introducing her will fall on me, for papa has lived almost entirely in Scotland since his marriage."

"And yourself, Mrs. Penryhn?"

"I live in London."

"So do I," I answered quickly.

"I thought Lady Grafton told me you had a place near here."

"Yes; but I cannot live in the country all the year round in single blessedness."

"Not married yet, then, Mr. Estcourt." She put the question with an assumption of ignorance, but she was perfectly aware I was not.

"No, Mrs. Penryhn, nor likely to be. I was in no hurry to follow your example."

"Why, what would my sisters have done for a *chaperone* else?" she said, trying to turn the conversation lightly; "I shall be a first-rate one now, by the time they come out."

"Shall you? Well, don't send them down to Freshwave then; for it's a dangerous place; and what is sport to some, is death to others. They have a very good proverb in Spain, Mrs. Penryhn, *Puerta abierta, al santo tiento*—The open door tempts the saint; and there is little doubt that time and opportunity work more mischief in this world than we can ever prevent by the force of what we call our will. I have had very bitter experience of this in my day."

Before she had space to recover from the confusion into which my words had evidently thrown her, one or two ladies rose from their seats, and in another minute the whole room was astir, and thanks and farewells were being exchanged by the dozen. In the midst of the general *mêlée* I managed to lean over the arm-chair, and say in a low voice:——

"Shall you stay here long?"

"I am engaged to spend the autumn at Lee."

"I am so glad to hear it."

She did not lift her eyes as we parted, but I ventured to press the hand she gave me ever so softly, and I did not think it was withdrawn quicker than it would otherwise have been; so having at last torn myself away in the midst of a fresh volley of lamentations over Emmeline's ankle on the part of my indefatigable hostess, I threw myself back in the carriage which conveyed me home, with a sigh which sounded much more like a note of content than one of relief.

What were my feelings—my ideas—my wishes on the subject? I could not tell. I only knew that I had asked this woman for her love three years ago, when she was neither free to give it, nor I to make my choice in marriage; and that we had met again, under completely altered circumstances, with my tastes unchanged and hers perhaps still to form. How should we act towards one another? with what intentions should I approach her? for that my present sense of happiness emanated from the prospect of meeting her again I did not attempt to deny.

It was useless to pretend to search my heart for an answer: I knew full well, although I could not at once acknowledge, to what my freshly-

springing hopes tended. I had believed so thoroughly that I had trodden down my love for Ada Rivers, that if I never experienced so deep a feeling for any other woman, it was impossible the old affection could be revived, that it was sufficient matter for surprise to find myself compelled to acknowledge its undying power directly I was brought again by chance within the range of her influence. Casting my eye backward over the events of the last three years, I should have found it hard work to reckon up all the women I had flirted with; romanced to; even imagined I had loved—yet, which of them had excited in me more than a passing desire—a momentary regret? There was but one woman in the world whose loss had darkened my future; made life appear worthless to me; and drawn tears from my eyes in the bitterness of my disappointment; and that woman I had seen to-night; still young, still beautiful; and better than both or either, *free*. My pulses quickened at the thought; my heart leapt; my blood burned; I no longer attempted to deceive myself. I knew I loved her; I knew I had never ceased to love her—that I should never cease to wish her mine.

The knowledge seemed to dawn upon me as on one who discovers he has been in possession of a treasure without knowing it. I was half wild with delight: the more I thought upon the past, the present, and the future, the more hopeful I became; and when I retired to my bed, it was but to spend a few sleepless hours, dreaming waking dreams of Ada Penryhn; seeing her as she had appeared upon the beach of Freshwave; in the cave at Crompton Bay; under the moonlight in the hotel garden; reviving all my dearest recollections of that hallowed time, and mixing them with a glowing picture of what might yet be; at the contemplation of which, my excitement knew no bounds. It is all very well to laugh at the magician Love, but we have good reason to fear his spells, were it only for the power he possesses to force us to make fools of ourselves. Fearful lest I should betray the feelings which held me captive, the next morning found me more than usually uncommunicative. Emmeline had managed to limp down to breakfast, and it required a great amount of perseverance on her part to extract anything but monosyllables from me.

"Now, Gerald, you are too provoking," she at last exclaimed. "You made such a virtue of going to Lee yesterday, that the least thing I expected was to hear you abuse the whole entertainment."

"That would be very ungracious, would it not?" I said.

"Of course it would: I only remarked it was what I expected, but you are mysterious as the unfathomable Sphynx."

"What mystery is it that you wish to unravel?"

"Who did you take down to dinner?"

"Miss Grafton."

"The fat one?"

"I really can't say—it was the eldest."

"Oh! the other has much the most to say for herself; well, what did you have for dinner?"

"My dear Emmy, do you really expect me to give you the whole *carte?* I forgot to learn it by heart."

"You can at least say whether it was a good dinner or a bad one. How many guests were there?"

"About twenty I should say."

"Any nice girls?"

"No; none that I saw."

"Poor fellow! any young people of any sort?"

"Very few; the company was chiefly composed of old married couples."

"Did they sing after dinner?"

"One lady did."

"Who was she?"

"A Mrs. Penryhn."

"Young or old?"

"Rather young."

"Pretty?"

"That's according to taste."

"Sing well?"

"Yes; very fairly."

"What is her husband like?"

"She has none: she is a widow."

"Oh! a widow; fat, fair, and forty, I suppose; has she lots of money, Jerry?"

"I didn't ask her, Emmy."

"Oh dear! how stupid you men are; there is no getting anything out of you."

"Rather, how inquisitive you women are! and what a deal of talking you manage to extract from nothing."

"Now do you mean to say that's all you intend to tell me about Lady Grafton's dinner?"

"I have nothing further to tell."

"Then you were not so bored as you anticipated."

"I am not aware what I said to convey that impression."

"Oh, Walter! *do* listen to the way that Gerald is going on," said my sister, teased out of all patience. "I believe that my prophecy came true, and he met his fate in the fat widow; and proposed, and was rejected before the evening was over, and that's the reason he is so cross this morning."

"You've hit the truth at last, Emmy," I said, as I rose and pushed away my chair from the breakfast table, "so I hope you will rest satisfied with your discovery, and absolve me from any more catechisms. What are you going to do this morning, Talbot? I feel inclined for nothing but a good scamper across country. By Jove! I wish September would make its appearance."

The next two days went very slowly for me. Doubtless they also did so for poor Emmeline, as her strained ankle did not recover itself so quickly as we had anticipated, and continued

to give pain whenever she attempted to put her foot to the ground. On the third morning, as early as I could, I announced at the luncheon table my intention of riding over to Lee, and leaving my card upon the Graftons.

"The thing *must* be done," I said, affecting to make a virtue of the necessity, "and therefore the sooner it is over the better, particularly as I shall not have much inclination to spend my days dancing after old women when the shooting season has commenced."

But my sister was very urgent that I should wait until she could accompany me.

"My ankle is sure to be well in another day or two, Gerald; indeed it is much better this morning, and scarcely pains me at all; and it is hardly worth while for us to make separate journeys to Lee."

"I can leave your cards for Lady Grafton," I answered, curtly. I was not overpleased at the idea of being deterred from making my visit alone.

"But what occasion is there for any hurry?" asked Emmeline, innocently; "it is not a week since you dined there, and people in the

country, and at such a distance, never expect etiquette to be kept up with regard to formal calls."

"I have not been reared in the country, you see."

"But you will wait for me, dear Gerald, won't you? I should so much enjoy going in your company, and I know it can make no difference to you. Or, if you would like it better, I could even drive over by myself and leave your card. I am sure Lady Grafton would excuse any ceremony, and she must know that seven miles is a long distance for a young man to go to make a morning call."

Anathematizing my dear sister's innocence and pertinacious desire to save me trouble, I flung myself out of the house on that occasion, in a humour which ill requited her patient affection for myself; and mounting my horse, rode out of Grasslands without any particular object except to drive away my dissatisfaction. The fact is, I was burning to see Ada Penryhn again: I had thought of little else, night and day, since I had met her; but I was too fearful that the women's wits (never so sharp as in an *affaire du*

cœur) would penetrate my secret if I suffered myself, by look or word, to betray my anxiety to revisit Lee. So I rode off disappointed and slightly sulky, blaming my cowardice in not doing exactly as I felt inclined; and yet not dreaming of acting in any way which could excite suspicion until I found myself some miles nearer the seat of Sir Phillimore Grafton than I had imagined I could be. Then an irresistible desire took possession of me; and setting spurs to my horse, I galloped without further thought to Lee, and found myself inquiring if the family was at home, almost before I had made up my mind whether I should call on them or not. The ladies were "in," however; and I was shown into an empty drawing-room to await their advent. In a few minutes, the servant who had admitted me returned to say that "the young ladies" were in the garden—pointing, as he spoke, to an open French window, through which might be seen a wide-spreading lawn sprinkled over with shady trees—and would I be pleased to join them there.

I would be pleased: I did not consider it worth while to tell John how much; and taking

up my hat, I prepared to do as he proposed. Before I stepped out, however, upon the gravelled terrace beneath the window, I paused for a moment to contemplate the scene before me; perhaps, who knows! to try to regulate a little that rebellious blood which, if I could judge from what I felt, was coursing over my features as though I had been a woman. The garden at Lee was one of those charming plantations which have been in existence for years, and brought to such a state of perfection, that it seems as though there is nothing left to be done which could possibly improve them. The turf was short and thick, and soft as velvet pile; not a weed; not a morsel of moss; not a pebble was permitted to disfigure it from end to end; and even beneath the ancient mulberry-trees by which the lawn was bordered, and at which Sir Phillimore was wont to grumble as destroying the grass by their vicinity and shade, it seemed to thrive as well as in most open places. Two mighty cedars of Lebanon, like gigantic sentinels, swept it with their branches at either end, and formed its boundary; and beyond them the eye lost itself in masses of um-

brageous vegetation, amongst which rustic seats and benches were placed at intervals. As I gazed from the open window, I caught the sound of laughter from amidst the clustering trees, and glimpses of variously coloured dresses as the wearers moved to and fro, apparently engaged in some out-door amusement. The wafted sounds of mirth were too tempting to be listened to at such a distance, particularly as I fancied that I could distinguish *her* voice amongst the others; so leaving the deserted drawing-room I walked rapidly across the lawn to the spot whence the sounds proceeded, and was soon in the midst of a very merry if not very wise assembly. Lying on a bench surrounding a mulberry-tree, which must have numbered several centuries, with her garden hat over her eyes, and a book in her hand, was the eldest Miss Grafton, whilst her younger sister was being chased round and round the trunk by a couple of mischievous little nephews. Two nurses, in bright-coloured cotton dresses, which had greatly added to the warmth of the picture from a distance, were seated quietly at work near at hand; whilst a vacant perambulator, and sundry other articles of infan-

tine use, showed I had hit upon a veritable nursery party. As I came upon them, Miss Grafton could scarcely have evinced more horrified confusion if a shell had suddenly been thrown in her lap.

"Ellen, Ellen!" she exclaimed, leaping off the bench, "here is Mr. Estcourt."

"Pray do not let me disturb you," I said with genuine vexation at creating such a commotion.

"Mr. Estcourt must take us as he finds us," interposed a rich sweet voice which was not that of Ellen Grafton, "and that is more in the character of nurserymaids than anything else."

I turned at the longed-for sound, and saw Ada Penryhn before me. Her light muslin dress was crushed and torn from the roughness of the children's play; her tangled hair was half over her face and half down her back; and sitting astride on her shoulders, a little foot clasped in either hand, she held an infant of about a twelvemonth old. Flushed, smiling, but eminently graceful, she advanced to meet me.

"I have not a hand to offer you, Mr. Estcourt, as you can see; you must shake one of Willie's instead."

Hand or no hand, I would have been well content, might I have stood and gazed at her for ever. She recalled to my mind a sculptured marble by Canova, of a Nymph and Infant Bacchus, which I had met with in my wanderings through Rome.

I knew now why that particular statue had so taken my fancy that I had stood before it, day after day, in silent admiration of its beauty.

CHAPTER VII.

"PRAY, Mr. Estcourt," now interposed the eldest Miss Grafton, "let me have the pleasure of accompanying you back to the house. Mamma would be so vexed if she knew that the servant had given you the trouble to come all the way down here. I am sure that she is at home, and I will find her for you directly, if you will allow me."

I was to be driven back, then, from the shelter of those delightful trees and the enchantment of the presence I had alone sought, and set down on an anti-macassared chair in a hot drawing-room to talk puerilities with garrulous old Lady Grafton. The danger was imminent, but emergency quickened my natural powers of invention.

"I am exceedingly obliged to you for the

offer," I said smiling, "but if I am not mistaken it would be lost trouble on your part, for I ascertained that Lady Grafton was not visible before I took the liberty of joining your party."

As I concluded, I glanced towards Mrs. Penryhn, and found she was regarding me with slightly elevated eyebrows.

"That is strange," she observed. "Your mother must have left the house since we did, Caroline, for she was knitting in the boudoir when I saw her last."

"Perhaps Lady Grafton had given orders that she did not wish to be disturbed," I suggested, rather uneasily.

"Perhaps so," said Mrs. Penryhn incredulously. The daughters were not sufficiently imaginative to be incredulous; they accepted my statement in good faith, and only remarked that if their mother had gone out, it would only be for a short time, and that if I would kindly wait, I should be sure to see her before I left.

"Are these your little nephews, Miss Grafton?" I asked, thinking we had had enough of the previous subject.

"Yes; they are Charley and Harry Grafton;

children of my eldest brother who is in India. They always come to Lee for their holidays."

"And this is a little brother, I presume," I continued, as I turned towards the infant which Mrs. Penryhn carried.

"A little brother!" exclaimed that lady, colouring with indignation; "why, Mr. Estcourt, this is *my own baby*," and lifting the child from her shoulder, she held him towards me.

I felt I must say something; that I could not remain as if struck dumb by the intelligence, or hurt the mother's feelings by supposed indifference; so I patted the boy's cheek and hand, and observed that he was a very fine fellow—but there I stopped. The news was quite unexpected; I had thought of Ada Rivers as a maiden; I had trained myself to think of Ada Penryhn as a wife; but it had never entered my imagination to dream she was a mother; and it is not too much to say that my first feelings, on the fact being thus rudely presented to me, were those of repugnance, not only to the child, but to herself. I had not had an opportunity of becoming personally jealous of her husband; Saville Penryhn had been to

me like a horrible nightmare, or a distressing thought, but I had hardly realised the *man*; I had never seen the two together; they were separate creations in my mind. But here was *his* child, his flesh and blood, born of herself; and at sight of the son, the memory of the father rose up like a tangible presence, and I turned away sick at the very thought.

Ada Penryhn seemed to guess my feelings, for she called to the nurse to take her child.

"I think I have had enough of Willie," she said, with a sigh. "He grows heavier every day."

"Ain't he a *beauty?*" exclaimed the nurse, with rapture. "Come, my king, you shall have a ride home in your carriage. See, ma'am, he's kissing his hand to you; there's a prince to kiss his hand to his mamma!"

"He *is* a darling," said Miss Grafton, covering the child's face with kisses.

"Good-bye, you pretty baby!" came from her sister; whilst the little boys clustered round the perambulator, and continued to incite the infant to go through his paces. The mother alone indulged in no ecstacies over his departure. She gently stroked the dimpled hands which lay

outside the apron, and directed the nurses to take him home. I fancied as she did so that there was a slight tone of disappointment in her voice, but I supposed all women were disappointed if strangers did not admire their offspring as ardently as they did themselves. Conversation seemed to flag a little after the exit of the nurses with Mrs. Penryhn's son and heir. The children had run after the perambulator, and the ladies and myself were left alone. The sisters commenced to collect their implements of work and play, in which duty I of course assisted them; Mrs. Penryhn was employed in attempting to fasten up her fallen hair; there appeared to be preparations for a general move.

"Allow me to carry those to the house," I said, as I took some baskets from the hand of Miss Grafton.

"Thanks; but it is really a shame to trouble you. We can send a servant to fetch them."

"Caroline, you have left your book on the bench," said Mrs. Penryhn, in a languid tone. I flew back to procure it; it was a volume of the "Quarry of Fate."

"Perhaps you have seen this before," said

one of the sisters, with would-be facetiousness, as I delivered it into her hand.

"But so long ago," I replied, "that I have really almost forgotten it."

"Oh, I am sure that *cannot* be true!" exclaimed Miss Ellen Grafton. "If I had written anything half so charming I should be always reading it over and over again. You will think us dreadful Goths, Mr. Estcourt, but really we never saw the 'Quarry of Fate' until Ada came down here; and then she told us it was the most delightful thing that had ever been written, and lent us her copy to read, the one I have in my hand."

"My dear Ellen," said Mrs. Penryhn, "if you *will* repeat my sayings, I wish that you would repeat them correctly. You asked me to recommend you a novel, and I told you that Mr. Estcourt's was very natural and entertaining, which I think it is; but I do not remember passing any other opinion on it."

She was evidently anxious that I should not imagine she thought too highly of my first attempt at literature.

"But I found you crying over the third

volume in your bedroom one afternoon, Ada," replied her friend, as anxious to exculpate herself from the charge of exaggeration. Mrs. Penryhn coloured, but did not evince any other sign of discomposure.

"Many books have had the power to upset me in that way," she answered, quietly, "particularly such as appear to have been drawn from life. It is very foolish of me; but I am rather too imaginative, and the 'Quarry of Fate' has certainly a very melancholy ending."

"You recognized, then, that it was drawn from life," I said, in a low tone. We had commenced to walk slowly homewards, and the Graftons were a little in advance of ourselves.

"I concluded it was, because the characters are so natural," she answered, evasively.

"You were right. I shall never produce such another book."

"Why not? You should improve with every effort."

"True; but I cannot describe what I have not felt, and I shall never feel so strongly again." There was a slight pause after this sentence, during which Mrs. Penryhn looked away

from me, and over the fields which stretched beyond the lawn.

"I suppose you are writing now," she said presently.

"I am not, but I intend to do so."

"You have wasted a great deal of time."

The expression "wasted" jarred upon my ear, and I replied that I had been collecting materials during my travels, and gaining an insight into human character, without which it was impossible to write.

"But since you have been at home," she continued.

"Since I have been at home I have been almost entirely in London; and the numbers of friends I had to see, and the press of engagements into which I was forced to enter, prevented my settling down steadily to hard work as I confess I should have done."

"Then you are, I suppose, of what I should call an idle disposition?"

"Scarcely that, Mrs. Penryhn, or I hope not," I answered, with some degree of pique. "But regular study demands regular hours, and those are just what it is impossible to keep

during the season. A bachelor cannot spend his evenings at home, like a married man; it is not to be expected of him; and sitting up late is not the best preparation for a morning's work."

"Certainly; but could you not write in the evenings?"

"If I did it would come to the same thing in the end. A single man, you see, can't go to bed at nine o'clock, or even eleven; and the night's fatigue would naturally——"

"Stay, Mr. Estcourt. I do not quite follow you. For *can't* should we not rather read *won't?*"

She looked in my face as though she were quite prepared to argue the subject, and my reply was given with some degree of hesitation.

"I dare say you think so, Mrs. Penryhn, but you can have no idea of the loneliness of a bachelor's life. Why, you surely would not have a young fellow sit by himself evening after evening; it would be enough to drive a man mad; he couldn't do it."

"He is in fact either too weak or too obstinate to do what scores of women do; is not that the case?"

"But women are not surrounded by the same

temptations; their mode of life is so different; their education has been so distinct."

"We have not the same opportunities for dissipating, I allow, and we may be thankful for it; but have we not mild temptations of our own wherewith to fritter away the weary hours? I am speaking from experience; you forget that I am a lonely woman."

"Forgive me, but it is hard to believe you are not always surrounded by as much brightness as you diffuse."

"Oh! I am not dull I can assure you. I have my books and my piano for amusement, and my child to think for and look after. I am never driven to seek pleasure for the mere purpose of killing time."

"Then you think that I ought to work *in* the season as well as out of the season?"

"I think that if you were in earnest you would not need to ask the question. Work is not only the end of our being, but the greatest blessing we possess."

"What *are* you two talking about?" exclaimed the youngest Miss Grafton, as she lessened her speed until we had come up with her.

"About something very serious and very practical," replied Mrs. Penryhn. "The propriety of work."

"But who ever thought it wasn't proper, my dear?" inquired Miss Ellen, with a stare. "I'm sure it's the greatest comfort one has; whenever I'm tired of reading or playing, I take up my crochet for five minutes, and you can have no idea what a quantity I have got through, by working at odd times. I finished three anti-macassars last year, just whilst we were waiting in the carriage at shops or people's houses, and now I'm making a counterpane in squares; there are to be one thousand five hundred squares in the piece, and I often do a quarter of one during an afternoon drive. Such nice work it is; so handy to take up, you know, so quickly done."

"Charming!" said Mrs. Penryhn, with just half a smile; "but scarcely an occupation for Mr. Estcourt."

"Oh! I didn't know you were talking of work for Mr. Estcourt; no, I never saw gentlemen do anything of that sort, unless it was cherry-nets. Papa often makes cherry-nets in the winter evenings, but I should scarcely think a

young gentleman would have sufficient patience for them, because the twine breaks so often. I wonder to hear you praising needlework, Ada. I am sure you are not very fond of it yourself."

"I know I am not, and therefore when I force myself to do it I am putting in practice the very theory I have been advocating. 'The modern majesty consists in work,' and the hardest work of all is to make our inclinations bend to meet our duty."

Her words were addressed more to myself than to her friends, and as she uttered them we reached the house, and her hand was held out to me as in farewell.

"Are you *going?*" I articulated in a tone of chagrin.

"Yes; I must look after my little boy, and you have to pay your respects to Lady Grafton, who I dare say has *come in again* by this time. Good-bye," and with a bright smile she ran lightly up the staircase.

I wished her "little boy" at the bottom of the sea. As long as that child lives, I thought to myself, there will be no gaining the mother's heart. She is a woman cut out to devote herself

to one object to the exclusion of all other interests in life. How little I knew the length and breadth and depth of her affections! The Misses Grafton then dragged me in to see their mother, who, strange to say, was discovered fast asleep over her knitting in the identical chair in which they had left her, at which the surprise of both herself and her daughters was extreme.

"How could John have been so foolish, mamma, as to say you were out, and permit Mr. Estcourt to toil all the way down to the shrubberies before he had ever looked if you were in the boudoir? It must have been sheer laziness on his part; he ought to be spoken to about it;" and they would have rung for the servant, and rebuked him then and there, if I had not pleaded for him to be excused.

"I dare say I misunderstood his meaning," I said, feeling terribly guilty as I recalled the man's words. "He said the 'young ladies' were in the garden, and I concluded therefore they were the only members of the family who were at home."

"I am sure it is very good of you, Mr. Estcourt, to try and take the blame upon yourself,"

said Lady Grafton, "very good indeed—yes; but servants are very troublesome and appear to get lazier every day. And so your dear sister is not yet well enough to leave the house?"

I sat with the old lady for more than half an hour, during which time she enlightened me considerably concerning matters connected with Sir Phillimore's ailments, and the parish of Lee, and made me promise that as soon as Emmeline was sufficiently recovered I should bring her over to luncheon with them. Then I took my departure and rode homeward, sensible that I had burdened myself with a promise which I should find very difficult to perform without disclosing that I had paid a visit to the Graftons, but in not mentioning which, there lay still greater danger, as they would be sure, during their next interview, to tax my sister with unkindness in not complying with their wishes. I thought over the best means for avoiding both pitfalls until I reached Grasslands, and fancied at last that I should be able to manage it without detection or having to resort to a subterfuge. Emmeline was so much better that evening that she sat at the dinner-table, and fortunately for

me, furnished by her own words an opportunity for my communication.

"I am nearly well, you see, Gerald; I shall certainly be able to go to Lee the day after to-morrow, so you will not have had very long to wait for me."

"No," I commenced in rather an awkward manner. "By the way, Emmy, Lady Grafton wants you to take luncheon there, when you do go."

"Take luncheon! Did she tell you to ask me the other night?"

"Confound you!" I exclaimed, turning round quickly to one of the servants. "How many times have I ordered this ice to be broken into smaller pieces! Do you expect me to put *that* into my wineglass?" And I shoved a block of four inches square so close under his nose that the man started back in horror at the anticipated application, and the ice rolled away on the carpet. Emmeline looked at her husband, as much as to say, "What can have disturbed him?" but her attention was diverted from the question she had put to me, which was all that I required, and a morsel of ice having been found by the

agitated domestic which would fit into my wineglass, tranquillity was restored at the dinner-table.

"Apropos of this luncheon at Lee, Emmy," I resumed, after a pause; "Lady Grafton mentioned it when she was speaking of your injured ankle: she said, 'As soon as your sister is well enough to leave the house I hope you will bring her over to luncheon with us.' I asked if we should go on any particular day, and she said, no, that they would be happy to see us at any time, and I have no doubt that she included Talbot in the invitation."

"Talbot would much rather be excused," said my brother-in-law, good-humouredly.

"Well, I should like it of all things," exclaimed Emmeline, "and I wonder if I might take Ethel? She would be so pleased to have a game with the little Graftons. You had better not accompany us though, Gerald; I am afraid it will be a great bore to you."

"Oh, no!" I said, carelessly, "I have no objection to make one of the party. I told Lady Grafton I would take you over. Besides, I have——" I was going to add "*to make a call*

there," but conscience rebuked me loudly, and I stopped short.

"To leave your card?" interposed Emmeline, and I was not righteous enough to correct her. "To be sure; but I thought I might do that for you. However, you could ride there and return directly after luncheon if you like; and, after all, when you come to think of it, it is not such a *very* great imposition."

"By no means," I replied, in a tone of condescension; "I dare say it will be rather pleasant than otherwise."

"You seem to think so," said Emmeline, laughing, and there the matter dropped; and, on the day appointed, we drove over in company with little Ethel to Lee.

"So good of you to come, my dear," said old Lady Grafton to Emmeline, as she received us in the dining-room, where the luncheon table was already spread; "so good of your dear brother to bring you, and so nice of you to think of bringing the dear child. Charlie and Harry will be delighted with a little playfellow—yes—and we shall be quite charmed if you will spend the afternoon with us—only sorry that the Colonel

did not accompany you—yes! I hope you will not be frightened at finding us alone—quite a family party, you know; we have no one staying at Lee at present except Mrs. Penryhn; a dear creature—yes—but a widow, and, of course, very quiet. Ellen, my dear, where is our friend? I am anxious to introduce her to Mrs. Talbot."

"She is in the nursery, mamma; she will be down directly." Emmeline glanced at me with an eye full of humour. The recollection of the widow, "fat, fair, and forty," had just flashed into her mind, and her look seemed to say "not only a widow, but with incumbrances, eh, Jerry?" I turned my back upon her, however, and pretended not to understand; I knew that in a few minutes her jesting would be at an end.

A gong sounded, and the servants took up their station in the room.

"Does Mrs. Penryhn know that luncheon is served?" demanded Lady Grafton of one of them. The man looked in an inquiring manner at his fellow, and Miss Grafton supplied his want of knowledge.

"She must have heard the gong, mamma; don't

wait for her, she never knows when to leave that child."

"Ah! a most devoted mother, and an example to all ladies, though I have no doubt, dear Mrs. Talbot, you need none. We will commence without her, then, for I know that if Willie needs her attention in any way, luncheon will hold a very secondary place in her consideration."

During this little eulogy of Lady Grafton's I avoided another mirthful glance from Emmy's eyes by busying myself in assisting the ladies to take their seats at the table, which being done the meal proceeded; and although I mentally writhed under the fear lest Ada Penryhn might choose to absent herself from it altogether, I was trying to make myself as agreeable as I could to the daughters of the house, when the door of the dining-room was suddenly thrown open, and a start from my sister, who sat opposite to me, so undisguised that it attracted general attention, warned me that the presence I longed for was at hand.

"I am very sorry," said the voice of Mrs. Penryhn; "I really did not know that you had company till just now, or I should have been more punctual."

Turning to encounter her I no longer wondered at my sister's evident surprise. Arrayed in a white muslin robe, made in that charming fashion which flows loose from the shoulders behind, and ornamented with knots of coloured ribbons, she looked as much a girl as she had done on the beach at Freshwave, as, indeed, having but just passed her two-and-twentieth birthday, there was no reason that she should not. But even after she had been introduced to Emmeline, the latter seemed scarcely able to realize that the bright blushing creature before her was the "widow" to whose appearance she had been looking forward with malicious pleasure.

"We did not wait for you, my dear Ada," said the apologetic tones of Lady Grafton, "as we thought you might be occupied with the baby."

"Thank you for not doing so," she answered, as, to my great delight, she accepted the chair next my own. I had trembled with pleasure as she entered the room, and could not help fancying that my sister had observed my emotion. Even as Mrs. Penryhn gave me her hand, in the careless informal manner which indicates that

acquaintances do not meet for the second or even third time, I saw Emmy's gaze bent upon us, not impertinently or curiously, but with a serious inquiry which was more difficult to meet than either, and to evade which I began to rattle off as much nonsense as I have ever been guilty of. After a few minutes, Mrs. Penryhn addressed Emmeline.

"I suppose that was your little girl I saw just now in the nursery, Mrs. Talbot. She would not tell me her name, but I guessed she had something to do with Grasslands from her resemblance to Mr. Estcourt."

"Do you think her like my brother?" said Emmeline, who flattered herself her daughter was the image of Talbot; "we have never seen the likeness ourselves."

Each lady at the table then gave her opinion on the subject, until Ethel had been pronounced to be like everybody in the world except her own progenitors.

"People have such fancies about resemblances," observed Miss Grafton. "Mr. Estcourt mistook Ada's baby for a Grafton the day before yesterday, when every one says it is the image of herself."

"Was Gerald here the day before yesterday?" asked Emmeline, quickly.

A moment afterwards, and I am certain she would have bitten out her tongue sooner than put the question, but it was then too late; Lady Grafton and her daughters had already turned upon her.

"Of course, my dear Mrs. Talbot. Surely you must know that; why it was then he so kindly promised to bring you over to see us."

"We had a very pleasant afternoon together, had we not, Mr. Estcourt?" said Miss Ellen Grafton, laughing, "and discussed the 'Quarry of Fate,' and all sorts of things."

I tried to laugh in return, but my effort was somewhat of a failure. Poor Emmeline, to whose nature anything like deception was so foreign, looked the guilty one as she stammered in reply—

"Oh, yes—of course—so he must have been—how stupid of me to forget!" and then retired into her plate with cheeks of crimson, whilst Ada Penryhn looked from my sister to myself, and from myself to my sister, until she too caught the infection of blushing, and we were all three confused together. Every one felt there had been

a mistake made, though no one seemed quite aware who had been the culprit; fortunately for us, however, our hostesses were not sensitively alive to a change of manner, and went on talking in a matter-of-fact way of the various incidents which had occurred during my last visit, until we all looked as if we had forgotten that a question had been raised relative to the fact of the visit having been paid. Still the tide of general converse did not flow quite so smoothly as it had done before. Emmeline continued to fall into short reveries, during which she looked hard at the saltcellars, and from which she wakened with a start, and Ada Penryhn became more taciturn, and responded to my small talk in monosyllables. I am sure we were all thankful, and I most of any, when Lady Grafton rose from the luncheon table and proposed that her daughters should conduct my sister round the gardens and conservatories.

"You will excuse an old woman, my dear," she concluded, "who cannot do without her afternoon nap, but if you will accept the girls as escort, I shall be quite lively again by the time you come in to take a cup of coffee with me."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE two Miss Graftons each seized an arm of Emmeline in the most impulsive manner, and bore her off in advance. Was it force of will which thus again threw Ada Penryhn and myself together; and if I had been "courting" one of Sir Phillimore's daughters, would the same happy combination of circumstances have chanced to favour me? I do not know, but I remember that things so happened, that it seemed perfectly natural that they should so happen, and that neither of us were anxious to alter them for ourselves. So we strolled leisurely along the old garden paths; she with her hat shading her eyes, and her eyes mostly bent upon the ground, I with mine fixed in admiration upon the graceful figure which moved by my side.

"Are you enjoying yourself here, Mrs. Penryhn?"

"Yes, very much. You think, I suppose, that because my friends are old-fashioned and dull, and one day at Lee passes the same as another, that I must be *ennuyée*, and longing for the time when I shall return to Kensington. But it is just the quiet and monotony of such a visit which is enjoyment to me. At home I have everything to think of, and no one to consult, and at times I do get rather wearied of solitude. Now here it is just the contrary; all care and trouble is lifted off my shoulders; they nearly kill me with kindness, and I have nothing to do but to rest and to enjoy myself. I always feel so much stronger after a visit to Lee, stronger in every way."

I had not given her by word or look an intimation of the meaning folded in my question, but she had guessed it without such aid, and I did not know which to admire most, her beauty or the quickness of her mental powers.

"How is it that I did not meet you in town this season?" I asked.

"Chiefly, I suppose, because I was not there all the time, and partly because I go out very

little. I saw Lady Claremont, however, on several occasions, and I know some other members of your family also."

"Which are they?" I demanded, curiously.

"Mr. and Mrs. Logan, of Sydenham."

"The Logans! Good heavens! how did you come to know *them?*"

She looked in my face with a comical glance at my surprise.

"In a very ordinary manner. I was introduced to them at the house of a friend, and Mrs. Logan called upon me."

"Do you remember that young man who insulted you at Freshwave?" I asked, getting quite hot over the recollection.

"No, not insulted me; that is too harsh a term to use: he only looked in at the windows. Yes, of course I do; he is Mr. Thomas Logan; I see him constantly."

"You *see* him! does he *call* upon you?"

She began to laugh at my excitement.

"Sometimes, but please don't be so fierce, Mr. Estcourt. I assure you he is wonderfully improved, and has quite left off staring in at the windows."

"It would be the worse for himself if he hadn't," I muttered. "You will allow me the pleasure of calling upon you in Kensington, Mrs. Penryhn?"

She bent her head so low, that, try as I would, I could not see her face.

"If I should be there during the season."

"But I am in town both in and out of the season," I replied, eagerly. "I live in Brook Street, and only come down to Grasslands for the shooting."

"That is a great pity," she said in return.

"Why so?"

"The owner of a place like Grasslands should live on his property."

"But my brother-in-law, Colonel Talbot, manages all the farm business for me far better than I should do it myself; and he enjoys the work whilst I should hate it under present circumstances."

"Yes; but there are surely other duties connected with the ownership of an estate besides being one's own bailiff. There are your tenants to become acquainted with and to benefit, and the people whom you employ to look after and influence; no servants work so willingly, or so

well, as under the master whom they know to be legally their own. If they see you take no interest in the property, they will begin to take none; and instead of improving with each year it will deteriorate; whilst you, to whom the charge has been committed, are wasting your time in London. Why did you leave the army?"

"It was my father's wish."

"I am afraid he did not read your character as correctly as I have," she answered, coolly, "or he would have seen that you are very unlikely to do any work which is not forced upon you. I suppose, however, he had little doubt that you would take up your position at Grasslands as one of the county landlords."

"I dare say he had little doubt," I replied, with a degree of acrimony, "that I should marry and have a wife for whose benefit to keep up the establishment. He did not know when he died, Mrs. Penryhn, that marriage was the very furthest thought from my heart, and has been ever since;"——"until now," I would have added had I dared. She made no reply to my remark, and we walked a few steps further in silence. Then she said, almost timidly—

"But do you not think, setting the good of Grasslands altogether on one side, that London is a very bad school in which to win your literary spurs? I can imagine that your feet once fairly set upon the rung of the ladder, place would make little difference to you; but now that the ascent is all before you, and what you write must be of such infinite consequence to your name, surely you cannot live too quietly during the period of composition. I fancy your father must have written his best works at Grasslands, and you acknowledged yourself the other day that London, for you, swarms with temptations to idleness."

"All that you say, Mrs. Penryhn, is exceedingly true, and I wish I could follow your advice. But I am afraid there is only one set of circumstances under which I could resign myself to vegetate in the country, and the chance of that is at present very remote."

"And is?——" she inquired.

"Not only marriage, but marriage with the woman I single from the whole world," I answered, boldly. "To turn the country into a paradise for me it will need a wife for whom earth holds no peer."

"In fact, such a one as earth holds not at all," she replied, with an attempt at gaiety. "Say at once, Mr. Estcourt, that you are wedded to your London life and are not likely to abandon it."

We had now reached the long line of conservatories, and during their inspection the conversation became more general. Mrs. Penryhn deserted my side for that of Emmeline, and the two women discussed floriculture together, and went into mutual raptures over the blossoms by which they were surrounded, whilst I did a mournful tour of duty with the Misses Grafton. But as we emerged from the houses again I blessed them for the alacrity with which they rejoined their new friend, both talking to her at once, and forcing Mrs. Penryhn to resign her place in the conversation, and her position on the gravel-path, two losses which I hastened to replace with my own company. We had not gone much further, however, when we came in sight of Master Willie, being wheeled along in state in his perambulator. The nurse stopped as she approached her mistress, and the child held out his arms to his mother.

"May I carry my baby a little way, Mr. Estcourt?" she said, in the prettiest and most pleading of manners. Of course the request made me feel awkward, and I stammered out some inquiry of why she should ask my leave for the occasion. She made no answer at first, but lifting the boy in her arms, directed the nurse to return to the house, and wait for her in the porch. Then, as we recommenced our walk, she said—

"Because you don't like my baby. I can see that."

"You are quite mistaken," I replied, very uncomfortable under the glance she directed towards me. "I am not much of a judge of babies, it is true; but I should think yours was a very fine little fellow for his age."

"He is a very *dear* little fellow," she replied; "you don't know what a comfort he is to me. I am sure he understands as well as I do when I am sick or unhappy, don't you, baby?" And as she spoke she pressed the little chubby face softly against her own, and my jealous heart began to throb with the same pain it had experienced upon first seeing him.

"Children are such a trouble," I remarked resentfully; "they occupy so much time and attention that no one gets any consideration when they are by—else they would be well enough in their way, I suppose."

"But see how much care they need, Mr. Estcourt; what little tender creatures they are: if their mothers did not look after them, who would? The Graftons are rather inclined to laugh at me about Willie, and think I make too great a fuss about him; but they do not know—it is not to every one I would tell—that it is the remembrance of my own neglected childhood that makes me so tender to the child. I am sure he is not spoilt, for he is the best baby possible—still I am sure you do not like him, and I can't think why."

This was said with a little pout and air of injury which was very emboldening.

"I am *jealous* of him, Ada."

She had halted beside a large syringa bush to gather a bunch of blossoms for the child; something in the tone of my voice, perhaps more than the words I used, arrested her attention, and her arm fell to her side.

I was just about to take her hand, had touched it, in fact, when Emmeline came suddenly upon us from the neighbouring bushes, having retraced her steps for the purpose of reminding me of the time. Ada Penryhn was rather rosy, and I dare say I looked conscious, but if my sister felt any surprise, she did not show it, for, woman-like, her attention was so immediately attracted to the infant that she almost forgot the errand she had come upon.

"Oh! what a darling fellow, Mrs. Penryhn; is this really your baby? do you think he would come to me? Gerald, dear, do you know it is nearly five, and Lady Grafton is kindly anxious we should take a cup of coffee with her before we go. I ran back from the house to tell you of it. Only thirteen months, Mrs. Penryhn, and with twelve teeth? you *ought* to be proud of him: I call him a splendid child! Has he been nursed or brought up by hand?" And the ladies commenced to walk homewards with their heads close together, and there doubtless ensued a learned disquisition on bottles and baby-jumpers, but from which, being totally excluded, I had no opportunity of taking

notes. I returned to the house, a little way behind them, watching all the pretty action of Mrs. Penryhn's head as it was shaken in grave dissent or nodded in approval, and wishing to heaven I could talk about babies like Emmeline if it should procure me one half of the animated looks which fell to her portion as she discussed the treasure and his doings. And the treasure was staring at me the while with wide-open blue eyes over his mother's shoulders; and since this claims to be an honest narration, it is not too much to say that mentally I shook my fist at him every time I encountered his innocent gaze, and thought what a blessing it would be if some untoward circumstance, over which I had no control, would come and put an end to him altogether. We took coffee with old Lady Grafton, after which we drove to Grasslands without my having had another opportunity of speaking to Mrs. Penryhn alone.

As soon as we were fairly on our way, Emmeline turned to me and said—

"Gerald! is not Mrs. Penryhn that Ada Rivers of whom Beatrice used to talk so much?"

"Yes, I believe Beatrice does know her, or used to do so."

"And the daughter of papa's old friend?" continued my sister, as if she had just made a discovery; "why surely you met her at Freshwave, four years ago. Don't you remember our talking of the subject in Brook Street one day at dinner, soon after I returned to England?"

"Confound the women," I thought to myself, as I looked out of the carriage window, "they circumvent one at every turn. Never do I flatter myself that they have forgotten a thing, or lay a little plot however neatly, but they begin to recall circumstances, and dig up proofs, and lie in wait for signs, and put this and that together, until a man may as well hope to make them believe that black is white as to conceal any mortal fact from their eyes."

"Well, Gerald," said Emmy's cheerful voice, when she had waited some time for a reply, "does it take so long to remember?"

"Whether I met Mrs. Penryhn at Freashwve as Miss Rivers? yes, of course I did, in company with dozens of other girls. If I had thought the

event possessed any interest for you I should have repeated it before."

"Why didn't you tell me you called at Lee the day before yesterday?"

"Well, I did not leave home with the intention of calling there; and after I had done so, I thought you would think I might as well have waited for you, that is all."

"You silly boy," said my sister; and then she appeared to fall into a reverie from which I roused her.

"What are you dreaming of now, Emmy?"

She turned towards me with the old sweet look, and placed her hand fondly on my shoulder.

"Do you remember the first time you visited Grasslands, Jerry, when I met you at the station and we drove home together through these lanes?"

"To be sure, dear. I can recollect how astonished I was at the magnificence of the carriage and horses and the livery servants, and how pretty I thought my sister Emmeline."

She blushed like a girl at the compliment.

"How old were you then, Gerald?"

"About eleven, I think."

"Thirteen years ago! only fancy, what a little fellow you were then."

"And how you spoilt me, Emmy."

"I have always been so much older than you, dear, and yet I feel, comparatively speaking, still so young, that I seem to have forgotten all this while that you have been leaving your boyhood behind you and springing into a man. You were twenty-five last birthday, Gerald."

"Yes, Emmeline; and if not a man, never likely to be so, I am afraid."

"To be sure—how stupid I have been! and yet I have always thought of you as a boy."

"Continue to think so of me, Emmy, and to spoil me into the bargain: I like it."

"I shall never do the first again," she said, shaking her head; "you have opened my eyes, Gerald."

I did not ask her in what way; but as the carriage stopped at the hall, she told me of her own accord.

"I like her so much, dear!" she whispered, as she put both her arms round my neck and kissed me.

Meanwhile I was not entirely satisfied with me visit to Lee. I did not go near the place

for some days afterwards, but stayed at home, brooding over the things which troubled me.

In the first instance I found it very difficult to reconcile myself to the idea of *the baby*. It would be distasteful to me in any case to think that my wife had been the wife of another man, still more so to know that her first-born child could never be mine. Where my feelings were powerfully concerned, I was unfortunately of a very jealous and exacting disposition; and although I did not wrong Ada Penryhn by fearing she would love this infant better than any she might subsequently give birth to, the fact of his occupying part of the heart I desired to win from her was gall and wormwood to me. These were very bad feelings doubtless, but I do not think they were unnatural. I had loved her from the beginning with an undivided affection, and it damped my ardour in the thought of marrying her, to remember that she could never be so wholly mine as I was hers. I did not take into account that if I had never loved another woman since we parted, it had not been for lack of trying to do so, and that my allegiance was due more to the power of her charms than the excess of my loyalty.

I did not argue with myself that the indulgence of a little innocent affection which God had bestowed upon her, and which not to have requited would have proved her unfit to be the wife of any man, or the mother of any children, must have enlarged instead of contracting the sympathies of her heart; and that the unlawful though meretricious loves in which I had wallowed since I had been disappointed of her own, had corrupted mine until the question should rather have been if it was a fit offering for the acceptance of any virtuous woman.

I was about, with all my imperfections on my head, to ask for her unsullied hand in marriage; and I dared to seriously cavil at, not a spot or flaw in the character of my beloved, which would have seemed as nothing beside the hundreds which defiled my own, but a circumstance which she had not brought upon herself, but which I chose to believe lessened her value as a wife. I had what I called a single heart to give her, which had only frittered away half its energies upon foolish lovemakings for which it had not had even the excuse of feeling a real interest, whilst she had thrown hers, it was true,

into the duties which life brought her, as she would doubtless throw it again should need require. However, when I at last argued myself out of the many objections I felt to the existence of little Willie, it was not by reason of any such conviction as the above. For one day I bore up manfully against the miserable idea that he would prove so serious an obstacle to my prospective comfort, that I might even have to give up my hopes of winning his mother: by the second, I had magnanimously resolved that if Ada Penryhn loved me I had no right to destroy her happiness for the sake of a child who might not live to be a man [and I am afraid the probable contingency had not much power to trouble me]; and by the time I had been parted from her for three days I was longing so much for another glimpse of her face that I determined I would marry her at an hour's notice, if she had twelve children instead of one. Having disposed of this matter, however, another yet remained. I still felt piqued when I recalled the manner in which Mrs. Penryhn had spoken of myself. She had set me down as of an idle disposition; as unlikely to do any work but what was forced

upon me; had said plainly that my duty was to live at Grasslands, fattening my stock, and writing my novels; and had mentioned the life I led in London in tones of unmistakable contempt.

If this was her unfeigned opinion, was there any likelihood that I should be able to satisfy her ideas as to the qualifications requisite in a husband? Could I give up my town pleasures; content myself with an occasional flying visit to London, and live quietly at Grasslands in her company? My heart whispered to me that I could. I knew that my restlessness and inability to settle had partly arisen from my early disappointment. I believed that in her love, freely given to me, I should find a haven such as it had never been my lot to anchor in before: still waters where I should furl my sails and be at rest, thinking no more of the bright waves which danced outside.

These were my first thoughts; and if my sense reminded me that perfect quiet is only pleasant whilst the storm is raging, and that when the sun shines again, and the breeze is just sufficient to bear the bark gallantly along, the mariner is apt to let his wishes with his fancy stray outside

the harbour, I put the idea impatiently away, and decided that "all that" was a matter for future consideration.

With respect though to my writing she should no longer call me idle. I had intended setting to work as soon as the shooting season was over: I now determined that I would do so at once.

"Emmeline, is there a room in this house which I can appropriate to myself, and where I can feel certain of never being disturbed?"

"Why—what for, Gerald?"

"I am going to write again: I have wasted too much time already."

"Will it not greatly interfere with your shooting?"

"A little, perhaps; but it must be done; I feel quite ashamed when I think that it is three years since I have attempted anything."

"There is poor papa's study, Gerald, just as he left it: you could scarcely find a better *sanctum*."

"No, indeed; it is all that I desire. Please give orders that none of my belongings are disturbed." And surrounded by mute reminders of the genius which had passed away, I sat down to write my second novel.

CHAPTER IX.

THE shooting season had now commenced, and I found it very difficult to sit steadily at my work. The most trivial circumstances which had occurred whilst I was out with my gun would sometimes disperse my best ideas: whilst occasionally, after a long day's sport, my physical powers were so wearied that I felt myself incapable of exerting my mental ones. At such times, throwing my pen on one side, I would mount my horse and ride over to Lee for rest and distraction.

Notwithstanding which, my book progressed rapidly. I had not sat down to it ignorant of what I was about to write. For months, and even years, I had carried about the plot in my mind, gathering a fact here, and an incident

there, and taking note of everything which I considered likely to enrich the story.

Not only amidst the gaiety of my London life, but throughout my foreign tour, my hero and heroine had travelled by my side, until I was so familiar with them, as well as with the minor characters of the book, that I fancied there was nothing more to be thought or learnt upon the subject. I could hardly be said so much to compose the tale as to transcribe it from the unwritten copy in my mind; consequently I wrote fast and pondered little. Remembering the *kudos* gained by the "Quarry of Fate," I had few doubts as to what reception public opinion would accord to my second attempt; I had no fear; I was too confident to be successful. To be plain, I was writing, not from an inherent love of the pursuit, or an earnest desire to do my best for the sake of raising the art, but simply because I longed to hear my name ring in the ears of men, and to prove to Ada Penryhn that I was not the lover of idleness she gave me credit for being. Under such circumstances, and taking into consideration the fact that I was otherwise deeply enamoured and actively engaged, it

would not have needed a very erudite prophet to foretell the fate which was in store for me.

I had become very intimate with the Graftons, and in their old-fashioned kindly way they made me welcome at all times. Thus I had innumerable opportunities of seeing and conversing with Ada Penryhn, and every interview I obtained with her increased my admiration and strengthened my love. Daily I discovered some new trait in her character which rendered it more worthy of my esteem, or some proof that those qualities which had first excited my interest in her had ripened into greater beauty with her advancing years.

I found that she was stanch and true in defending her friends behind their backs. She would not permit even so much as an insinuation to be made which reflected on their eccentricities; and one day when I had been sufficiently careless as to speak of old Lady Grafton by some nickname in her presence, she administered a lecture to me that I did not easily forget. But at the same time I knew that she was quicker, perhaps, at discerning what was comical in others than I was myself; for so

long as there was no possibility of wounding the feelings of those who had been kind to her by the action, she could, with a stroke of her pen, draw the most graphic caricatures, the humour of which struck every one who saw them. I have my desk at this moment piled up with such mementoes, to almost each of which I could point and tell on what day and hour, and for which occasion, her ready fingers sketched it. Another discovery which I made was that she was the owner of a heartfelt religion, pure and undefiled. Perhaps some may imagine that, being so worldly a man myself, this fact could not possess much interest for me. They are vastly mistaken. The muddier and more turbid I knew the waters of my soul to be, the greater delight I felt in gazing in the crystal stream which emanated from that of her I loved. I knew that I was unworthy of her in every respect, and especially in this; yet I could not have worshipped her had she been made of clay. A woman without religion is a living lie, a fair sepulchre full of dead men's bones. She comes into the world intended by her purity and beauty to refine and elevate our grosser natures; she

fulfils her mission by rendering us worse than herself. The most reckless man that ever lived has some spark of the divine left in him wherewith to yield the honour due to a religious woman. Not that Ada Penryhn's faith was manifested by much going to church or making of long prayers. It was a very quiet and undemonstrative religion which she practised. She never preached me extempore sermons on my mode of life; I do not believe she had ever entered a Sunday schoolroom; I am sure I never heard her quote a text. Still I knew that the feeling was there. Every one knew that it was there, whilst she made no concealment or demonstration of the fact.

She was by no means of a simple, trusting nature; she had seen too much of the world, and had thought too deeply, to permit her to be so. She could not, with her experience, have been intelligent, and remained childlike. On the contrary, with all her motherly love, her girlish fun, her universal charity, she had more the head of a man than a woman. In company her youth made her merry; her beauty made her confident; her desire to please made her talka-

tive; she appeared merely as a very engaging woman who could converse on most topics, and had, as the phrase runs, "plenty to say for herself." But taken alone, when a serious mood was on her, sounded on subjects not fit for discussion in a crowd, her ideas drawn out on the deepest questions of the day, whether theological or social (I do not think she ever dabbled in politics), and then Ada Penrhyn showed of what she was capable. The more, however, that I strive to define her character, the more difficult I feel the task to be. How is it possible in a few pages of print to combine the lights and shadows, the sunshine and rain, the hilarity of one moment and the thought of the next, which made her life one long variety, an ever-shifting panorama of head and heart? The more I saw of her the more she charmed me, and I had reason to believe that she was not only thoroughly aware of my affection but ready to return it. What was it, then, which held me back whenever the words in which I should ask her to pledge her faith to me rose to my lips? She was her own mistress, and I was in an excellent position to marry; yet when the favourable opportunity

presented itself (and how often did it not rise to tempt me?) my courage melted away, and I felt no right to address her. Sometimes I fancied that she almost expected the question to come; that she read my heart and saw how hard it was for me to tune my speech to other notes; still I could not speak. Even when, one day towards the middle of October, I heard she was about to leave the Graftons to visit her father in Scotland, I remained dumb. To the very last I hung about the carriage which conveyed her away, feeling almost guilty in my continued silence, and fancying (though I believe this was but fancy) a shade of coolness in her manner of addressing me as if she were disappointed in my conduct. The baby and I were excellent friends by this time, and as I placed a parting present in his hands, I ventured to ask his mother not to forget me. Whatever answer she made to my request was lost in her busy endeavour to arrange her various small belongings on the back seat of the carriage; and as I saw the vehicle drive away with her, and considered how many temptations to banish me from her memory she might encounter before we met again, I could have

cursed myself aloud, not for my diffidence, but for the folly which had engendered it.

For the thought which had ever risen like a mocking-devil to dry upon my tongue the confession of my love for Ada Penryhn was the thought of Julia Sherman.

A few days ago, whilst I was busy over this history, my sister Beatrice, whose two eldest daughters have already been launched upon society, bustled into my writing apartment.

"Gerald," she exclaimed, "is what I hear true, that you are going to publish the story of your own life?"

"It is, Beatrice," I replied, laying down my pen in compliment to her presence.

"Rather a rash proceeding, I think. I only hope you will not put anything about Julia Sherman in it."

"But how could I write my life without," I demanded, "since that unfortunate name became entangled with the most eventful parts of it?"

"Well, if you will mention such things, you must be prepared to have all the critics down upon you; they will say that your book is not a

proper one for girls to read, and not fit to be on a drawing-room table; and, indeed," continued my sister, bridling her matronly person, "I should be very sorry to see such a story in my own daughters' hands."

"You would be sorry that Laura or Harriett should learn that I, or any other man, had ever led a dissipated life; and yet I think I heard you mention before them the other day that Sir Charles Dudley, who had dined at your table the night before, is said to be the greatest *roué* about town."

"Oh, my dear Gerald!" interposed my sister, hastily, "that is nothing to the purpose at all. Girls cannot be expected to go through the world with their eyes shut; and we know that such things *are;* but that is a very different thing to sitting down and deliberately reading about them in print."

"Very different indeed!" I echoed, sarcastically; "in the one case the bare fact is told, without the possibility of holding forth the temptations or accidents which may have led to it, either as warning or excuse. In the other, the relation is introduced, not only that it may serve

as a beacon against the shoals on which any one of us may be wrecked: but to teach us, when we would judge our neighbours, that there may be extenuating circumstances behind the most glaring outrages upon what we call society. Yet, my dear Beatrice, I am quite aware that in these days of light, when men appear in public beside characters whose names they dare not mention in private, and call their racers by the slang titles awarded to women of the same stamp; when girls discuss the doings and dresses of the *demi-monde* as if they were fashionable topics; and even newspapers have been known to devote their leading columns to the police court adventures of the same persons; a history written on a subject like mine will in all probability be pronounced dangerous food for the *immature* minds to which the name of 'Anonyma' is familiar as a household word. Be comforted, then, with the assurance that I shall not feel in the least offended if you forbid Laura and Harriett even to cut the pages of my book; in fact, my dear sister, I aspire to write for those who already know the world, and their approval is all that I wish for."

"But the critics!" gasped Lady Claremont.

"Well, as to the critics—but I will say nothing about them, or they will assert that I have attempted to disarm them beforehand, which I have neither the right nor the wish to do. I only hope that as they are great they will be merciful, and not forget Pope's lines:

"Whoever thinks a faultless piece to see,
Thinks what ne'er was, ne'er is, nor e'er shall be:
In every work regard the writer's end,
Since none can compass more than they intend;
And if the means be just, the conduct true,
Applause, in spite of trivial faults, is due."

"I can't say I echo the sentiment," exclaimed my sister, leaving the room more irate than she had entered it, "and since I see you are determined not to take my advice, I hope they will cut you up well;" and I have little doubt her pious wish will be gratified.

To return however (with such as are not too fastidious to follow me) to the subject of Julia Sherman. It is not easy to describe the feelings with which I regarded this girl. To say that I was utterly indifferent towards a very pretty woman who professed an attachment to me, is to write myself down, cold-blooded, which I assur-

edly was not. On the other hand, to allow that a heart which was filled with the image of Ada Penryhn, could stoop to do more than take an interest in Mrs. Sherman's daughter, would be equally untrue, and I had felt from the beginning that if she had not been rich in outward attractions I should never have been so readily duped into believing that Julia cared for me. The interest, however, which I had experienced for her had already died out; the discovery that, instead of having thrown herself upon my protection as a poor orphan girl left destitute of everything but such affection as I could give her, she had deserted her mother's roof, and a respectable life, for the sake of a better establishment, had caused a great revolution to take place in my feelings regarding her, and from that hour she had ranked no higher in my estimation than the most fallen of her sisters, for she had done voluntarily, what I, with all my careless disregard of right, would not have tempted her to do. From the moment when she had come to me in Brook Street I had never been easy in my mind; often had I sat by myself for hours, questioning whether I had not com-

mitted a fearful sin by accepting the girl's offer, and aiding her to take a step which must be irrevocable. But since the date when I had met her mother, and learned by what a tissue of deceit I had been drawn into leading her wrong, I had acquitted myself of all blame in the matter. Now, my whole wish was to be rid of an encumbrance which had become intolerable; of a responsibility which, had I read my heart aright, I had never incurred. I was anxious to tell Ada Penryhn that I loved her, but my loyalty forbad my doing so, until I had made such arrangements as should prevent Julia Sherman from ever saying that she had a claim upon me. I could not ask the one for the promise of her hand until I felt confident there was no circumstance in my present life which could justify her refusing my request, and yet, it was hard to make up my mind to go through such a scene as I imagined must precede my breaking off all intimacy with the other.

It is seldom we do anything foolish or wrong, but we find ourselves entangled in the meshes of its effects at the very moment when we most wish to be free. My perplexities kept me un-

decided until Christmas was near at hand. One day I had settled upon this course of action, the next upon that, but through all my uncertainty I never relinquished the conviction that on Ada Penryhn's acceptance or refusal of my offer of marriage depended my future happiness or misery. At last I made up my mind, and resolving that it was not incumbent upon me to waste my life for a chimeric duty, told Emmeline that I should run up to town for a short time. I had often visited it during my sojourn at Grasslands, so that she evinced no curiosity as to my design in doing so, and after the absence of a few weeks, I returned to keep Christmas-day with them—a free man. It is needless to detail the means by which I escaped from bondage, or what the person whom it most concerned thought of my resolution. Suffice it to say that she received the news with far less emotion than I had anticipated; that a certain legal document which secured a comfortable provision for her lifetime appeared to act as a wonderful salve to her wounded affections; and that we parted good friends.

From that time I was the most lighthearted

of men. I could not communicate with Ada Penryhn because she was moving about the country, and had given me no encouragement to do so by leaving her address; but I knew that she intended returning to Kensington early in the year, and I wished to take her answer from her own lips. In the meanwhile I was not idle. The painters and paperers had not been put into the house in Brook Street the year before as I had needed it for immediate occupation; now I took pleasure in dismantling the old place, and having it bravely adorned, thinking the while that *some one* might occupy it, even before the season was over. I laughed inwardly as I caught myself thinking rather prematurely how this room would make a pretty boudoir and that a good nursery, and remembered that I was actually about to ask permission to have *that baby* imposed upon me for life. I found I had not yet perfectly realised the fact; I was quite ready to become a husband, but it was rather awful to consider that the placing of a wedding ring upon Ada Penryhn's finger included my investiture with the dignity of a stepfather. I hurried over the last volume of my novel, more

quickly perhaps than any *man* has had the rashness to do before; drew up all the threads of my story with one vigorous pull, tied them in a good hard knot, and then broke them off short. "Brevity is the soul of wit," I said to myself as I wound up the loves of my hero and heroine. "There is no use in spinning out the account of a reconciliation; it never takes long in real life, and as Pope says, 'First follow nature, and your judgment frame, by her just standard,' so I shall leave twaddle to the women," which I consequently did, and devoted a couple of chapters to explaining away the long series of misapprehensions and mysteries with which the remainder of the three volumes was filled.

But so far I gained my object that the work was finished and in the hands of my publisher before the season had commenced. As soon as the improvements in Brook Street were completed, I was foolish enough to take up my residence there, although London was as empty as a nest in autumn. The clubs were only half filled; the company in the Parks chiefly composed of the lower orders; the shopwindows, a mere blank compared to the glories which should be

theirs, thereafter; and I rode or wandered amidst these solitudes, without any better occupation but such as the various fears, hopes, doubts, and anticipations of my feverish brain afforded me. I had ascertained the address of Mrs. Penryhn in Kensington, and every afternoon I used to ride past her little house, and glance wistfully at the windows to see if the blinds were yet drawn up; and twice a week, if not oftener, I would stop to inquire of the woman left in charge when her mistress was expected home, to which she generally replied that she was sure she couldn't tell. On one particular afternoon, following a day on which I thought I had observed a more than usually acrid expression on the countenance of this worthy female as I summoned her to answer my persevering inquiries, I resolved that I would not call at the house for another week at least; and turning my steps deliberately in the other direction, entered the reading-room of my favourite club. I had scarcely set my foot upon its threshold, however, before all my feelings of gloom vanished as if by magic, for George Lascelles' hand was in my own, and his hearty voice pouring forth a

string of questions, as to my whereabouts, and the reason of my appearance.

"I never expected to meet you here, old boy," he said; "it's the most confounded piece of good luck that ever happened to me. I made sure you were vegetating at Grasslands, studying cows and milkmaids, and all that sort of thing, and wouldn't be up in town for another month. What brings you, Estcourt?"

"What brings you, Lascelles?" I replied laughing.

"Business, my dear fellow, *pur et simple*, but you have no such excuse. What can have induced you to leave the country before Easter?"

"Because it is positively more *ennuyante* than town, and that is saying a great deal. Besides, I have been furbishing up the old house in Brook Street, and the workmen wanted looking after. Where are you staying, George?"

"At Long's. The upper stories in Cavendish Square are wrapped in curl-papers and brown-holland pinafores; and I couldn't go and live with the charwoman and the blackbeetles in the kitchen: I am too particular about my character."

"Exactly so! well, you must come to me; it

will be the greatest charity, for I have thought of committing suicide more than once during the last week."

"There is nothing I should like better;" and linked arm-in-arm, my cousin and I left the club-room, and sauntered up New Bond Street. He was full of fun and information, and rattled away on the subject of his own flirtations with the same ease that he told a story about his father's butler. I envied his flow of spirits and careless freedom of manner; whilst he rallied me upon my backwardness in relating my own adventures; and opened his eyes very wide when I chanced, in the course of conversation, to inform him of certain changes which had lately taken place in my affairs.

"Halloa, Jerry!" he exclaimed, "what's come to you, old fellow? going to turn Methodist?"

"Or Mormon," I replied; "one is as likely as the other."

"But not so pleasant," he answered, gaily. "I'd rather be the Mormon by half, if Salt Lake City wasn't so out of the way. By Jove! there's a pretty girl!"

He was looking in the direction of a miniature brougham, which was standing outside a shop door, as he spoke. I raised my eyes at his exclamation, and saw the face of Mrs. Penryhn. In a moment I had left his side, and was leaning in at the carriage window.

"Mrs. Penryhn! I am so delighted to see you; when did you return?"

"Only last evening, Mr. Estcourt."

She blushed deeply as I addressed her; but I was certain that her voice had not the same tone of cordiality with which she used to greet me at Lee.

"I have been at your house almost every day to inquire when you were expected home," I continued, "until I am afraid the old lady in charge was rather tired of answering my questions."

"Indeed! I have returned earlier than I intended."

"I may call, may I not?" I said, thrusting my head still further through the window, and looking full in her face. "I have been so anxious to meet you again."

"Yes, certainly; I shall be pleased to see

you," was her reply, and she stooped as if searching for something in the fluffy mat at her feet.

"Have you lost anything, Mrs. Penryhn?"

"Yes—no—it does not signify, thank you."

There was assuredly a difference in her manner, as well as her voice; it was cooler, more constrained, and as if she were only anxious to get rid of me. Still I would not permit myself to be discouraged, but repeated earnestly—

"I have been hoping to see you again for so long; when may I call on you? this evening?"

"This evening!" she exclaimed, shrinking from me. "Oh! no, Mr. Estcourt, pray not!"

"Well, to-morrow then."

"I am very busy just now," she faltered, "having so shortly returned from Scotland; and——"

"I *must* speak to you," I returned, decidedly; "I have something very particular to say."

I felt that I had anticipated asking her that question so long that, now I had met her again, I could not wait another moment. The energy of my words startled her, and she answered, though nervously—

"Well then, to-morrow afternoon, if it is really of consequence; but I lead a very quiet life, Mr. Estcourt, and do not often see visitors."

"It will rest with yourself, Mrs. Penryhn," I replied, significantly, "whether I am a frequent visitor at your house or not;" and raising my hat as I spoke, I left her to rejoin George Lascelles. I saw, by the look of intelligence which sprung into her face, that she understood the meaning of my words; and felt that I had already committed myself, and had but to accept such answer as she might choose to give me. My cousin was of course very ready with his insinuations on the subject of my *rencontre* with the lady in the miniature brougham; but as he would have been just as full of badinage with any man who had spoken to a pretty woman without introducing his noble self to her especial notice, I bore his jokes with as much equanimity as I could assemble, until he wearied of them, and left off asking for her address of his own accord. We passed the evening in some gaiety together, throughout which I could not, for one moment, dismiss the knowledge that before that hour came round again I should have taken my

answer, for weal or woe, from the lips of Ada Penryhn. Never, since I had determined to ask her to be mine, had I felt so fainthearted at the prospect of her reply. Her behaviour on our unexpected meeting, although not positively repellant, had been too formal to be called friendly, and was a strikingly apparent change from the intimacy we had enjoyed in Dorsetshire. Was she angry with me, or weary of me? had she heard anything to my disadvantage? seen any one she liked better? These questions fretted and worried me through the livelong night, as they have done many a lover before; but the more perplexed and anxious I felt, the more determined I became that I would solve my doubts and suspicions as soon as ever I had speech of her again. Rising in the same mind, I loftily refused to give George Lascelles any notion of the business on which I was bound, but mounting my horse at the very earliest hour at which fashion permits us to see our neighbours, rode off quickly in the direction of Kensington.

CHAPTER X.

It was with a beating heart that I knocked at the door of Mrs. Penryhn's house. It was one of those tiny places which swallow up huge rents, and formed part of a crescent which stood back from the road, with a carriage drive all to itself, and overlooked Kensington Gardens. The woman servant who opened the door to me appeared as if her head nearly touched the ceiling; the winding staircase was so narrow that I felt inclined to gather up my coat tails, lest I should overthrow the statuettes which adorned the little niches in its wall; the drawing-room into which I was eventually ushered was completely filled by a couple of sofas, and several lounging-chairs, which seemed as though they had been placed there for the convenience of

such visitors as wished to inspect the array of porcelain, tinted glass, ormolu, and wood-carving with which the walls were decorated. Everything, however, was in good taste; there was not a piece of rubbish in the room; the only colours employed in furnishing were subdued, and there was little gilding; all this, notwithstanding my agitation, I took in at a glance.

Mrs. Penryhn kept me waiting for nearly a quarter of an hour: to me it seemed as though she would never appear. I had purposely avoided thinking of what I should say to her; I knew that when I looked upon her face words would come to me naturally, and, naturally, best; yet now in the suspense of attending her presence, speech after speech continued to force themselves into my mind, and some of so absurd an import, that I dreaded lest in my nervousness during the coming interview they should reappear without my intending it.

At last there was the sound of an approaching footstep, and I nearly upset a whole stand of knick-knacks as I hastily rose and strove to dispose myself against the mantelpiece in an attitude of negligent unconcern. I heard her

leave the upper room, advance to the landing, and then retreat again as if uncertain what to do; finally she set her feet upon the staircase, but stopped then to dally with her child, and issue some orders to the nurse, which, although delivered in a voice which was intended to be very off-hand and collected, betrayed somehow to my listening ear that the calmness was assumed. Her indecision gave me courage, and when, a few minutes afterwards, she entered the drawing-room with cheeks that were very pale and eyes that were suspicious of her having wept, all my timidity at the prospect of addressing her evaporated, and I only remembered that she was a *woman* and I a man, able and willing to share the sorrows from which my love could not protect her. I had not intended to rush at once into the subject. I had purported, at least, to pave the way to my proposal by a few ordinary sentences, but the sight of her evident distress drove everything from my mind but the errand upon which I had come, and instead of releasing the hand she gave me, I held it fast and said—

"Ada, do you know the reason for which I am here to-day?"

"I have guessed it," she answered, faintly.

"The question I have come to ask you has been hovering on my lips for months past, but I have not dared to utter it. I put it to you once before in the hotel garden at Freshwave. You know what was your answer at that time. Am I to have the same again?"

She did not speak to or even look at me, but her face alternately flushed and grew pale, and I could feel the trembling of the hand I held in my own. At last she articulated—

"Pray let me sit down, Mr. Estcourt."

I let her go, and she threw herself into a chair. How differently is deep emotion displayed in real life to what most novelists describe it to us. My fate was hanging upon the reply which should issue from her lips as certainly as if I had thrown myself upon my knees, or refused to release her before she decided it. Yet I permitted her to pass me as quietly as though she had been my sister, and taking possession of another chair, wheeled it along the carpet to the side of hers, and following her example, sat down and waited patiently until it should please her to speak to me. Finding, however,

after a few seconds that the answer did not come, I said—

"How much longer are you going to keep me in suspense, Ada?"

"What am I to say?" she asked, with a mixture of petulance and trouble.

"You know that I love you—you must have guessed it, seen it long ago. Do you love me in return?"

She covered her face with her hands as she answered—

"Yes—you must have seen it also; but I cannot marry you!"

"Cannot *marry* me—and why?"

I do not think it was unreasonable in me to feel surprise; I was of good birth and connection, had youth and health in abundance, and a patrimony which, in moderation, could satisfy the desires of any one. If she loved me, as she had confessed she did, the only obstacle that I could see between us was removed.

"If you care for me, Ada, why not? My fortune is not large, but it is sufficient to supply us with——"

"Oh! it is not that," she said, interrupting

me; "pray do not think so meanly of me. When I was at Lee I thought nothing could be brighter than the prospect before us, but since then—since then——"

"Since then—what, dearest? tell me all," I said boldly, taking her hand; for her manner assured me that, whatever the objection she foresaw, in the end I should be victor.

"I have heard such dreadful tales of you, things I could scarcely have believed possible, and which have made me feel that you and I can never be happy together."

"And who repeated them to you, Ada?"

"I must not tell you that, but I fear that they are true. It is useless dissembling; I must not have any false shame in this matter" (but as she spoke a deep blush overspread her face). "Gerald, I have heard that you lead a dissipated life."

"You have heard wrong, Ada; I do no such thing."

"Nor have done?" she said, inquiringly.

"My dearest girl," I answered, "if you insist upon my delivering up the history of my past life before you promise to be mine, I will obey

you; but you know enough to be aware that such a request is, in any case, a foolish if not a dangerous one. Some day, if you wish it, you shall hear all, but it will be best for both of us if you refrain. Men are not women, Ada; their doings, when they owe faith to no one, will not generally bear inspection; but you do not, I hope, so far wrong me as to suppose that if you trust me with your precious love I shall do anything to disgrace the responsibility. I can go further, and say that ever since I entertained the hope of winning it I have kept myself for you alone. Over the past I have no control, but you have my present, and I swear that the future shall be yours; will that not satisfy you?"

"Say no more, Gerald; if to-day is mine and to-morrow shall be, I have no wish or right to pry into the things of yesterday. Yet now, your motto must be 'All or none.' Perhaps you will think me exacting, but if you love me——"

"*If* I love you, Ada! I have loved you from the hour I saw you first, and no grief has ever sunk into my soul like the bitter disappointment you gave me at Freshwave. I was but a boy then compared to what I am now, but I

have never seen another woman whom I would ask to be my wife. Will you not give me my answer?"

Her hand moved gently from her side and stole into mine. I clasped it as though held in a vice.

"You engage yourself then to me, Ada? You are not afraid to promise to marry me?"

"Upon one condition, Gerald," she whispered.

"It is granted, dearest, before it is asked," I eagerly exclaimed. "I would not resign the happiness of this moment were you to demand my life in return." And leaving my seat, I folded my promised wife in my arms, and all my doubts and fears went to sleep upon her lips.

It was an indescribable five minutes that followed Ada Penryhn's acceptance of my proposal. We sat with tightly clasped hands, silent but inexpressibly content, experiencing one of those rare periods in life when we forget our mortality, and almost believe that heaven has begun for us. She was the first to break that silence; her knowledge of the fallibility of human enjoyment was greater than my own; and she

roused herself and me from that short dream with a sigh.

"And now for my condition," she said; "we must not forget that. Gerald, do you think you can give up a life of dissipation for my sake?"

"But what do you call a life of dissipation, Ada? I am not aware that I have ever been guilty of such; I have only lived as other men do."

"You have answered my question," she said, sadly, "*as other men do.* That is what the man I marry must refrain from doing. I do not suspect that once pledged to myself you would prove inconstant; I could not love you if I did; but if you would make me happy you must give me the spirit as well as the letter of your faith. It will not be sufficient for me to feel that you mix in scenes of dissipation without partaking of them; you must not mix in them; you must come to me unsullied. I want to know when I touch your hand that it has not touched that of another woman; when I meet your eyes that they have looked admiration on no one else; when I hear your voice that it has not even professed to compliment others;

and particularly," she added, with a shudder, "such others as are the only ones you will meet in the scenes to which I have alluded. I know my condition is a hard one; I feel that it will be difficult for you to comply with; and therefore, Gerald, if you think the same, forget what has just passed between us, and let us be friends as we were before."

But I only held her hand the closer, and forced her to turn her face towards me and renew the promise which she had first given, whilst I warmly asserted that the possession of herself would be the commencement of an era of happiness for me, purer than any I had tasted yet, and which would so completely satisfy my heart as to leave no room for meaner desires.

She smiled at my rhapsodies; but she still looked incredulous. Perhaps she had been told the same thing before, and proved it to be false.

"You must not be angry with me, Gerald; but I feel that you should know my whole mind. I am aware that the world makes a great distinction between the sexes in this matter; that it permits men to indulge in every excess, whilst

if a woman has one stain upon an otherwise spotless character, she is supposed not to be fit to become the wife of one who has run riot up to the moment of his marriage. We accept the verdict, such as men have made it for their own convenience, but we do not indorse it; we listen to the assertion that such a life is necessary for them and not for us, but we do not believe it; we profess to shut our eyes to their goings on, and our ears to the tales against them, but we both see and hear, and those of us who think—*feel*. We know that God made no such laws between us; that He never intended to give the one entire liberty without the possible contingency of blame, and the other a life of humiliation for one false step. Whether it is the best means by which men can have carried out the Creator's design that they should be the protectors of the weaker sex, will not be known, I suppose, until the day when He judges us all, pending which, it is a system which is working inevitable harm to women."

"In what way, Ada?" I asked.

"By making us lose faith in you, Gerald; in your justice and your power of leading us right.

There have been heavy complaints lately, both in private and public, about the women of England. Girls are said to be bolder, and less ready to marry for love than they used to be; married women to be flirting, 'fast,' and given to extravagance in dress; the whole tone of society, in fact, to have become lowered. This may or may not be the case; but if it is, you may be sure that the reason of the alteration is to be found in yourselves. *What women are men make them.* We do not dress, and dance, and sing, and talk for one another: we do it for you. Whatever men show us to be the taste of the age, that taste we insensibly adopt. No lectures upon extravagance; no animadversions upon free manners; no attempts at talking down false hair, false complexions, and false figures will have the least effect so long as you show us by your conduct that such things are not repulsive to you in others, whatever they may be in ourselves. Whilst young men desert ball-rooms for less respectable places—where dancing is carried on; vote our pic-nics a 'bore,' yet will accept a bachelor's invitation for the same with eagerness; pretend, in fact,

to be '*blasé*,' and 'done-up' for every properly-conducted entertainment, though we know they are lively enough elsewhere, young ladies will imagine that it is the '*laissez-aller*' style that they miss when mixing in society, and endeavour to render themselves more like what they conclude their gentlemen friends admire."

"I should think 'young ladies' had very seldom heard or thought of such things and places as you allude to, Ada."

She smiled at the ignorance displayed by my remark.

"I believe that is what most men imagine, Gerald, but they are greatly mistaken. You can scarcely let your light burn so palpably as you do in this nineteenth century, and expect us not to catch the reflection of its glare. Women know you nearly as well as you do yourselves: or if they err, it is not on the side of leniency, for their fears and their pique exaggerate the evil, and I fancy some of you would be rather astonished if you knew what Lotharios your lady acquaintances give you credit for being."

"But what has all this to do with us, Ada? From this hour you will have no need to make

conjectures about me, for my heart and my life shall be alike open to you."

"But are you sure that you are not promising more than you can perform, Gerald? You have been reared to consider such an existence necessary to you; can you give up, not the companionship of friends of your own sex, nor the gaiety to be found in good society, but association with such as are in no society at all? I have thought deeply on this subject, almost, I may say, since I was a child, for the first thing which made me think of it was the loss of my poor mother. You know how that happened: you must know it; it has been in everybody's mouth; but I was taught to consider her as dead, until the fact of her existence and disgrace was revealed to me by the tattle of the servants in my father's house. At that time I was too young to understand all that I heard, but I never forgot it; and as I grew older, and listened to other tales from the same sources, of the gay life my father led, I used to sit alone and wonder why he was still at the head of his household, honoured and respected, and she—my mother, who had never died, had been sent forth with

her name branded with infamy. The thought sunk very deeply into my heart, until I began to associate the idea of my living mother with each act of my daily life; and I never witnessed any signs of my father's prosperity or happiness or wealth without seeing another picture of her fancied misfortune and misery. But one day, when I had not long been introduced, my feelings received a fearful shock. I had learnt the name of my mother's betrayer, and as I sat at a large ball supper the lady next to me turned round to the gentleman who was waiting on her, and addressing him with a sweet smile as Lord Edward Grieves, desired him to fetch her what she wanted. I could scarcely look at him, but I knew in a moment who he was. I tried to continue eating, but the food stuck in my throat; the brilliant lights and the flower-bedecked table danced before my eyes; I thought I should have fainted. He was there, his breast decorated with the honours he had won in his profession, received with smiles by his hostess, permitted to touch the hand of the young and the pure, whilst she whom he had dragged downwards, defiled and left, God knows

where, would, had she dared to enter that place, have been hooted from it as if she were unclean. Oh, Gerald! who made this difference between us and you?" and overcome by the pain of her recollections, Ada Penryhn hid her face in her hands and sobbed aloud. I tried to comfort her, but it was difficult to know what to say; I felt the force of her argument, but I also knew there was no remedy for the evil.

"It seemed to turn me altogether against men," she said, presently; "the injustice and the cruelty of social law struck me so forcibly that I felt up in arms for my whole sex. I perceived that men had framed such a law to protect themselves and not us; that whilst they would preserve intact the sanctity of their homes, they put no limits to their own liberty; and that their object in laying so heavy a punishment upon a woman's dereliction of duty was to force us to a purity of life of which they did not choose to coerce themselves to set us the example. The same principle is carried out through all our laws. We are supposed to be the weakest sex, both in mind and body; yet we are punished

the most severely. One false step on the part of a wife, and no extenuating circumstances will be taken in excuse for a man's outraged honour; fifty false steps on the part of a husband, and if he has not injured the woman he has sworn to protect by personal violence, the law does not hold him liable. He may break her heart by little and little, but if he does not break her head she must remain tied to him for life. Oh, Gerald! it is easy for any one who knows the laws of England for women to see that our *protectors* have had the making of them."

"But, my dearest, you have never suffered yourself, I trust, from the inequality of the world's judgment respecting men and women." This I said, because I fancied from her total silence respecting her marriage that it had not been a happy one. She changed countenance when I mentioned the subject, but she was stanch in her duty to the dead.

"Gerald, that is my past. Let us bury it with yours."

"But you did not love Penryhn, Ada?" I asked, anxiously.

"Would you care for me more if I confessed

to having entered into a mercenary marriage, or do you believe that I shall love you less for having been a true wife to my first husband? Remember that he was the father of my child; that if he engrossed my affections or disappointed my hopes, he can never do either again, and let us respect the grave where he lies."

"But you did not love him as you love me, Ada, say that, dearest?" I persevered. I should have needed no better answer than the glowing face she turned upon me.

"If it will make you happier to know that life never seemed so fair to me as it does at this moment you may rest content with the assurance. Upon that *one* condition, Gerald, that you are mine only, I am yours henceforward, to do as you will with."

"And for that promise," I answered, "I would put my seal to fifty conditions instead of one."

This was all that I ever extracted from her relative to her married life. The name of Saville Penryhn was never discussed between us, or if in my folly I sometimes attempted to force her to confess her indifference to his memory, I found that her rebuke, though

gentle, could be as steadfast as her love. Yet she betrayed herself, though unconsciously, before we parted on that first happy day.

I was standing at the door, loath to lose sight of her, long after she had asked me to go, when I closed it again, and, for about the twentieth time, returned into the centre of the room.

"Ada, I am really going, but—tell me once more that you love me."

She laughed softly, took my hand in both her own, and laid her forehead gently against my breast.

"You *know* it, Gerald. What need is there to repeat it over again?"

"And since when, Ada?" (I could not see her face, but I saw the blush which ran along the youthful parting of her hair.) "Only since this morning?" She laughed again and shook her head. "Since I first met you at Lee?" another shake; "what, *before* that, Ada?" I seized her face in my hands and turned it up by force; it was crimson.

"Not at Freshwave? Darling, did you love me at Freshwave?" Two large tears rose

slowly into her grey eyes and hung trembling on the dark lashes.

"Gerald, you will never be untrue to me. I have waited for this, so long."

This was all, but it nearly turned my brain with joy.

CHAPTER XI.

As soon as Ada and I had announced our engagement to our immediate friends, the letters which we received were various, and characteristic of the writers. Colonel Rivers simply indited a note in which he wished us all happiness, and sent me an invitation for the grouse season; and as he had nothing to do with the disposal of his daughter's hand it was more than I had expected from him. My mother, on the contrary, paid the postage from Paris of four sheets full of negative congratulations, in which she "trusted" I had chosen wisely; but could not say she was without her "fears," knowing too well, alas! what style of people my "father's friends" had usually been. She hoped that I had remembered what St. Paul said about being "unequally

yoked with unbelievers," and that I had selected a "Mary" as my partner for life. All this was less annoying to me on account of its ill-timed quotations, as because I remembered only too vividly the conversation I had had with my mother in Paris respecting Lilias and Mons. le Sage, and how briskly she had then refuted all my objections to my sister's marriage with a person of opposite faith. But consistency had never been one of Lady Mary's virtues. Beatrice took an early opportunity of sending me her good wishes. She had always liked Ada, she was pleased to say; there was a *je ne sais quoi* about her, which set her above the herd; at the same time she thought it a disadvantage in these days for a man to have *too* pretty a wife. Gertrude's letter did not arrive for some weeks after the others, and then it was full of grumblings. She had nothing to say against Mrs. Penryhn, but she was "*terribly disappointed*;" had expected me to do "*much better*;" I had a right to look "*much higher*;" I might have married into the aristocracy if I had so chosen; why, there were her sisters-in-law, my own cousins, Cecilia and Mary Lascelles, right under my nose, and either

of them would have had me if I had proposed to them; oh! she had no "*patience*" with me; and neither had I with her flighty epistle. Emmeline's, after all, was the only one that gave me pleasure; I carried it to Ada the day I received it, and we read and answered it together. She was so very sure, this dearest sister of mine, that she had foreseen it from the very beginning; she was so warm in her congratulations, so tender in her hopes, so certain that she and Ada had but to know, to love each other.

"I love her already," said my *fiancée*, as we finished the perusal of the letter. "I used to think, Gerald, when I saw her at Lee, that if you never asked me to be your wife, I could tell my disappointment to her, and not be afraid that she would despise me for the confession."

But although Emmy's affection thus gratified me, I cannot say that the indifference displayed about my new prospects by my other relations had any power to damp my happiness. It was too profuse for that.

I went on my way, spreading the news far and wide, and calling on my acquaintance to rejoice with me. The intelligence appeared to be re-

ceived amongst the Estcourts with the greatest surprise. Perhaps they had imagined that I was too wild to think of settling down quietly in marriage; perhaps the wishes of some of them had fathered the idea. My aunt, Mrs. Logan, positively changed countenance when she heard of my engagement. "*You* about to be married!" she exclaimed; "and to Mrs. Saville Penryhn! well, I hope the young lady knows what she is about." I only laughed at her dismay; I could afford to be amiable. I even jogged my cousin Thomas's memory about the scene at Freshwave, and asked him if he did not suspect I had a *penchant* for Miss Rivers even then. He did not reply however, except by one of his old looks of sullenness, which vividly recalled the time I alluded to; and as I saw the remembrance was not so pleasant to him as it had become to myself, I dropped the subject. I heard it recorded that the only remark made by my spinster aunts, Sarah and Susan, when they heard of my intended marriage, was to the effect that if I expected to get anything out of *them* for a wedding present, I was very much mistaken; that I had robbed the family sufficiently as it

was, and *they* could not forget, whoever else did, that if all had their due, the Castlemaine diamond would at that moment be in the possession of their brother Jabez, to will away as he thought fit; but as I only repeat this speech from hearsay, I cannot vouch for its accuracy, however great the probability that it was made. To none of my uncles did I trouble myself to make a formal announcement of my engagement to Ada Penryhn except to Mr. Jabez Estcourt. He received the news with his usual grunt.

"Rather soon to put on the fetters, uncle, is it not?" I added, with an attempt at pleasantry; "but it must have come, I suppose, sooner or later."

"Don't see the necessity of it," he growled in reply.

"I can't agree with you. I should have made a point of marrying, anyway, if it was only to prevent your brother William's children from stepping into my shoes. The only difference is, that in the present case I have a prospect of happiness instead of misery; but if it had blighted my whole life, I would have neglected no means by which I could secure to my children's children

the position which, after yourself, I hold as 'head of the family.'"

My uncle smiled a grim smile.

"You can't forget that," he said, roughly.

"I never intend to forget it," I answered; "if you had thought of it more, uncle, you would have taken care to leave a son behind you, whose claim to be so called should have been indisputable." But the next moment I feared I had gone too far. Never had I seen the countenance of my uncle Jabez display so much emotion. His features gave a sudden twitch, and then a torrent of crimson poured over his face, and he turned upon me in a rage—

"How dare you, sir, express your opinion as to what I should or should not have done? You speak to me of a subject which not one of my brothers or sisters would presume to approach. You have well earned the character they give you of a forward upstart."

His words nettled me.

"I am my father's son," I replied, "and a true Estcourt; and I speak my mind because I am not ashamed of it. I am sorry if I touched you upon a tender point, and since you are so

quick to take offence, I will revoke the opinion which I innocently expressed. I think one uncle Jabez, after all, is enough for any family."

My words, strange to say, instead of making him more angry, had the effect of calming him.

"I *was* quick," he replied. "Let us say no more about it," and from that time we were as good friends as before.

My uncle, Lord Portsdowne, heard of the step I proposed to take in a very different spirit. He prophesied marriage to be the best thing for me; wished that his younger sons would follow my example; took his wife and daughters to call upon Ada directly they returned to town, and voted her the prettiest creature he had seen since the days when he had been in love himself. My cousin George clapped me on the back and declared I was the luckiest fellow going; and Jack, after having sent me a volley of playful abuse on my intended desertion of the bachelor corps, came up to town, and on being introduced to my future wife, revoked all his previous sentiments, and went so far as to add that if I would only find him such another there should be two weddings on one day.

So far, all went smoothly. I was drifting surely, as I thought, into that quiet haven of still waters which had appeared so desirable a rest to me, and my content was so complete that I imagined I had reached the acme of human bliss. I had not yet learnt that we never know what the greatest happiness is until we have lost it. The first incident which occurred to damp my ardour, and make life look a little less beautiful to me, was the publication and criticism of my book. With the commencement of the season, the three volumes duly appeared, rich in gilding and colour, and with fresh, crisp, uncut leaves—a fit offering, as I fondly imagined, to lay at the feet of my love. It was with some such words that I placed a copy of the work in her hands, and she received it with far greater pride than I put it there. In a couple of days she had finished its perusal, and then I naturally looked for her opinion of the story, hoping, I may almost say trusting, to hear her express a flattering one. It would be so pleasant to have her for a critic, if she approved, and I scarcely doubted, caring for me as she did, that she would approve. But Ada Penryhn was essentially

truthful, and no amount of love could overbear her conscientiousness. I was forced to ask her for her verdict more than once before she delivered it, and then I did her the injustice to think that she expected too much of me.

"I like it, Gerald," she said, deliberately, "but chiefly, I fear, because it is yours. Anything which came from your pen and was a reflex of your mind would interest me; but when I can succeed in separating my judgment from my partiality, I know that this book is not so well-conceived or written as the 'Quarry of Fate,' and I believe that you are capable of doing far better than either."

This was not a very encouraging address for an author who thirsted to hear himself pronounced a genius, to listen to; but it was nothing to what I suffered a few weeks later at the hands of the professional critics, who used their scalping-knives so liberally upon my unfortunate volumes, that after reading the reviews I could never regard my work in the same light as I had done before.

It was "foolish," it was "fast," it was a bad imitation of the lowest and worst school of

French literature. My heroine was picked to pieces; my hero chopped into mincemeat; my story pronounced to have been hastily composed (which was untrue) and hastily written (to which assertion I could not give so flat a denial). Almost everything which had been said in order to praise my first book was now contradicted in order to condemn my second; and one paper in particular, which on that occasion had prophesied that I should rival, if not excel the talent of my father, was now most virulent in my abuse, and averred that I was an example of the fallacy of the saying that "like begets like." This was the notice that most affected me: that they should revile myself, was perhaps natural, and, at all events, possible to bear; but that they should make my shortcomings the occasion for dragging in my dead father's name, and holding up my attempts in derisive comparison with his, had power to make me tremble with impotent rage. Many other criticisms appeared, but almost all unfavourable. I could not imagine but that some secret enemy had been at work to do me this wrong. I felt as though I were standing alone, against a pitiless

shower of stones, without a shelter for my bare and unprotected head.

My friends, for the most part, behaved as friends usually do in such emergencies; they had all perceived the very same faults in my book that the papers pointed out, and had thought it a great pity from the commencement that I had introduced such and such a subject, or wound up in such and such a manner.

They were also very attentive in sending me copies of the newspapers in which the most scurrilous reviews appeared, so that I sometimes received as many as half a dozen "Revilers" by the morning's post, and four or five "Stingers" by the evening, generally accompanied by a note in which the sender expressed his sorrow at the "unseemly attack," although, as he always thought, it certainly would have been better, &c. These shafts usually came from one of the Estcourt bows, and I may have flushed under their ill-nature, but nothing more. They were but pin-pricks after the real wound which my vanity had received. I am sure I thought of Ada's disappointment as much as of my own. I had so hoped to make her proud of me, and now she

would be ashamed. This idea possessed me to that degree that for days after the worst reviews appeared I did not go near her house. But at last my longing for sympathy overcame my false pride, and I found my way to Kensington. Her first words were an inquiry for the reason of my unusual absence.

"Where have you been, Gerald; out of town? I have expected to see you every day this week, and almost began to be afraid that something was the matter. You have not been ill, have you? yet now I look, you are certainly paler than usual."

"I have only been worried, Ada; so worried that I did not like even to come here," I answered, throwing myself into a chair. "These wretched reviews—but I suppose you can scarcely have seen them?"

"I have read them all, Gerald."

"Have you! a pleasant dose, weren't they? You see, you were right in your judgment, Ada, and I had better have turned my attention to farming than to literature. A ploughshare is a fitter implement for me, I fancy, than a pen."

I suppose I spoke bitterly, for she drew

nearer to me, and took my hand: it was hot and feverish.

"And is it possible, dear Gerald, that a few unfavourable reviews can have the power to affect you like this? Why, your hand is burning, and you look as if you had scarcely slept since I saw you last."

"No more I have," I answered. "I have scarcely slept or ate. The thought of those vile attacks follows me wherever I go, and turns my life into a hell."

"Oh, Gerald! you must care for the good opinion of the world far more than I do. Nothing could have the effect upon me which you mention except it came through those I love. You will never be fit for a public life if you are so sensitive to every rebuff."

"I could bear rebuffs, Ada, but I cannot bear to be publicly abused and reviled, and to know that such reports have found their way into every house in Britain, and been read by friend and foe. When a man insults me I know how to answer him, but for these cowardly paper attacks there is nothing to be done. I can only, as the saying is, 'grin and bear it.' But I have found the

task so difficult that they have robbed me of all my peace, and made me afraid to show my face anywhere, even at Kensington."

"That is very foolish," she replied, "and very wrong. If you are sick or sorry, Gerald, to whom should you come, but me?"

"But are you not ashamed of me, Ada?"

"Ashamed of you, and why?"

"Because of these horrid reviews."

"Do you think they have altered my private opinion about your book? I told you what I thought of it when I first read it. I believe you can do better, but it is far above the average."

"But the 'Reviler' says it is far below it, Ada; that they are doubtful whether the plot exceeds the writing in folly, or the writing exceeds the plot in weakness of execution."

She gave an impatient movement with her foot.

"You speak of the 'Reviler' in the plural, Gerald, as if its reviews were written by a body of competent men; whereas, as likely as not, your book has fallen into the hands of a rival novelist. But even supposing your critic to be a sensible man, and his opinion unbiassed, one swallow does not make a summer."

"But almost all the reviews are bad," I exclaimed despairingly.

"I acknowledge that they are, and some of them unfairly so; but the principal papers being against you the smaller ones take their cue from them. However, what I want to impress upon you is, that if you have really the ability to write, no amount of bad reviews can rob you of it. They may retard your success, but eventually you will succeed. Neither do I believe they have the power imputed to them of making or marring a book. I am not a writer, but I am a reader, and the bystanders are said to see most of the game. I know that I have never been deterred from the perusal of a new work by an unfavourable review, neither, I believe, have any of my friends; indeed I think that the more they are abused the more they are read. We have proof of this in some of the most popular novelists of the present day, whose books gain the widest circulation and the loudest blame; and I remember my father telling me how he has known your father laugh till the tears ran down his face as he read what he called 'a regular slasher' upon one of his own productions.

'If these fellows only knew,' he used to say, 'that they've given me a better lift upwards than a page full of flattery could effect!'"

I had heard this story of my father before, but it had slipped my memory; now I felt grateful to her for having recalled it to me.

"Then you do not despair about my yet doing something worthy of my father's name, Ada? you would not advise me to relinquish my hopes of succeeding as a writer?"

"Relinquish your hopes! what, give it up altogether? my dear Gerald, what are you thinking of?"

"But if I am to be abused like this each time," I said, "I shall never get on. I feel now as if I could not write again: I have done my best, and the best has been pronounced very bad indeed; so what's the good of trying any more?"

She looked at me for a moment in sheer surprise at my weakness; and the smile with which she answered my question had a *soupçon* of pity mingled with its love.

"And did you really expect to succeed all at once; to find the road to fame strewn with

nothing but flowers; to encounter no drawbacks, no difficulties by the way; to gain, in fact, by one effort what other men have toiled for years to obtain? I could scarcely have believed it of you. You wish to be enrolled as a disciple of the highest art: would it be the highest if it was open to every one? I am afraid, Gerald, you have been flattering yourself with the idea that if your father's mantle has fallen upon you you will be able to attain the position which he enjoyed without the labour by which he earned it. Now, let us try and analyse why your book has failed; for, however hard criticism may be, public opinion is not generally unjust. Is not what some of the newspapers say true, that you wrote it too fast?"

"Slovenly composition, half-finished plot and ungrammatical writing," I said, quoting one of the sentences which were burnt in upon my memory.

"Come, never mind that," rejoined Ada playfully, "we will forget the 'Stinger,' Gerald, now I am going to be your critic. But I think your book *was* written too fast, and whilst you were thinking of other things."

"Here is my excuse, then," I said, winding my arm about her, for her sense and sweetness were winning me out of my evil humour. But Ada would not allow that she was any excuse for my shortcomings.

"'When a man has once adopted his profession,' she said gravely, "he should make it his first object in life—nothing should be permitted to precede it. 'The court, camp, church, the vessel and the mart, sword, gown, gain, glory"—these are the thoughts which should be first with men, last with women. Who does not blame the man who loses a battle, sinks a ship, neglects a parish, or wastes a fortune, and pleads his love, anxiety, or fear for a woman in excuse for his failure of duty? No, Gerald! say you were too confident, too indolent, or too fearless of consequences to apply yourself heart and soul to your work, but do not lay the blame on me. I would have been the first to urge you to closer application had I but known it."

"I believe you would, but the fact remains; from whatever cause it may have arisen, I have undeniably failed. Why, just look at the difference between the reviews upon this book and

those on the 'Quarry of Fate.' My mind was just as preoccupied then, Ada, and with the same object too, yet nothing could have been received more favourably than it was."

"You were labouring under disappointment then, Gerald; but you had received what you considered a final answer to your suit; this book was written whilst you were still in a state of suspense and uncertainty—a very unfortunate mood under which to attempt composition. However, may not the criticisms upon the 'Quarry of Fate' have been partly influenced by the fact of its being your first attempt; also of your father being still alive and popular amongst us? A second work invariably receives a harsher judgment, because the reviewers look for improvement and oftener find deterioration; and you must not forget that now you stand alone. I have often heard that it is the most unfortunate thing for an author to receive much flattery at the onset of his career: he finds, as he imagines, the road to success so easy that it makes him careless: he leaves off taking pains, and if he eventually succeeds it is through much tribulation. I know that these paper attacks

are very hard to bear, Gerald, but you may turn their abuse into use if you so choose. Instead of permitting them to discourage you, resolve to make your future give their prophecies the lie; let the sharpness of their censure sting you into action; make you put your shoulder to the wheel, and, thinking of nothing but the power within you, *determine* to succeed."

"Will you be proud of me if I do, Ada?"

"Not prouder than I am now," she answered fondly. "Your love is what makes my pride, Gerald, not your talent."

"Have I any?"

"Plenty, if you choose to dig for it; but talent is like ore; that which takes the least trouble to procure is generally the least valuable. Genius may be a great gift, but perseverance is a greater; for perseverance can do many things without genius, but genius can do nothing without perseverance. We are too apt to lose sight of the truth that labour is necessary to all success." As she spoke thus to me, my dying father's words came to my remembrance, and the Estcourt motto "Labore vinces," which he had cautioned me not to forget. My spirits sunk

again as I thought how disappointed he would have been, had he lived to see me so spoken against, and a deeper shadow stole over my face, which Ada, womanlike, was quick to see and to guess the cause of.

"Do not let us speak any more of it, dear Gerald; the thing is past, we must try nd aforget it."

"I cannot forget it," I said gloomily; "I have been too humiliated."

"Cannot I lighten it to you, dearest?" she whispered.

"You lighten all things to me, Ada. You are my light, and my warmth, and my harbour of refuge, the sun of my existence and the hope of all my future." As indeed she was, and no other. But notwithstanding her most tender encouragements for me to take heart and shake myself free of my trouble, it was many weeks before I could lose the recollection (even for a moment) of the words in which my unfortunate book had been spoken of by the reviewing periodicals.

CHAPTER XII.

When I made that promise on the occasion of my engagement to Ada Penryhn, to let my motto, with respect to my fidelity to herself, be "All or none," I did it with an honest determination to keep my word, nor had I considered the condition a hard one to fulfil. I had arrived at an age when music-halls, cafés, and other places that drive their trade by night, had lost with their novelty the power to charm me, and I was only too glad to pass my evenings at the houses of my friends and in respectable society. To continue on intimate terms, however, with my many bachelor acquaintances without joining their schemes of pleasure as heretofore, I did not find so easy. It was impossible for me to tell them the stringent reason for which I

desired to live quietly; and if from any backwardness to consent to their invitations they ever guessed it, I was sure to be assailed by the argument, "Come, old fellow, you're not married yet, you know," and laughed at for being "owned by somebody," until, however much I loved my fetters, I felt that they were on me.

I believed that I could be faithful to her "in the spirit as well as the letter," did she but trust me; and the idea of not being trusted would make me sometimes vote her as unreasonable as the rest of her sex. The truth is, I wanted to be both bound and free; bound to her and she to me, by a link which no man should dare to think of severing; but free to go where I listed, judged by my conscience only. I wanted, in fact, to serve both God and mammon, and the task seemed as easy to me as it does to others—before they have tried it. The laughter of my cousins was about the hardest thing I was called upon to bear; but to a mind sensitively alive to ridicule, it was not the trifle it may seem to some, particularly as, having once discovered my hesitation to mix in the company they revelled in keeping, they took a mis-

chievous delight in trying to entrap me into joining their parties of pleasure, and at times so far succeeded, that I had no means of withdrawing from the engagement, without almost confessing my reason for doing so. I was too old, and I trust too sensible to allow them to persuade me into yielding against my will and better judgment; but constant battling with their arguments fretted my temper, for no man likes to acknowledge that he is under coercion to the other sex. If the terms of my condition with Ada Penryhn had permitted my joining in their amusements, they would have been the first themselves, as men of honour, to condemn my indulgence in any further dissipation; but not even to join, was, in their eyes, going a step too far; it was entering the lists of married men before my time, writing myself down already as having gone out from amongst them, and become separate.

One morning, in the early part of June, George Lascelles strolled into my room, and asked me if I would accompany his brother and himself to dine at Richmond on the following afternoon.

"Who is going?" I demanded, with my newly-acquired caution.

"Only ourselves and a few other fellows," he said, carelessly; "Jack is going to drive down tandem with a friend of his, and I'll take the other seat in your cab, if you'll let me."

"Yes, if I go," I answered.

"Now, Jerry, my boy, I won't take any excuse; *la belle fiancée* must give you a holiday for once in a way, for I expect you will not get many after this season." And indeed I expected the same, though with very different feelings from those which were expressed in the compassionate tones of my cousin.

"I cannot possibly give you an answer yet," I said, "for I am not quite sure whether I made an engagement to Ada for to-morrow evening or not. There was some talk of our going to the Opera."

George immediately consigned the Opera to a place of torture.

"You can go there any night," he said, contemptuously; "do get off it, Jerry, and come with us."

"I will if I can," I answered, cheerfully.

Yet as I rode to Kensington that afternoon, I rather hoped that I should not. A quiet evening at the Opera with Ada was a great enjoyment to me; and I was not always sure how George's bachelor entertainments would turn out. He was a very good fellow, and a perfect gentleman; but he had never been much addicted to ladies' society, and his most indulgent friends could not but call him wild.

But as I entered Ada's drawing-room, walking in unannounced, as I was privileged to do, a sight met my eyes which was always unpleasant to them; nothing less than the form of Thomas Logan lounging on the sofa, and looking as if he had settled himself there for an afternoon's enjoyment. It was not the first time by several that I had caught him in the company of my betrothed; and although I could say nothing to his paying her an occasional visit, he knew as well as I did whether I liked to see him there. The fact of his so often obtruding upon her presence had considerably lessened the cordiality which had been recently established between himself and me; and we seemed to have once more returned to our normal condition of mutual

aversion. As I made my appearance on the afternoon in question, he entirely dropped the conversation he had been carrying on with Ada, and after lingering until he was convinced there was no chance of my vacating the field before himself, rose awkwardly, and took his leave. The door had scarcely closed behind him before I exclaimed—

"What on earth makes you admit that fellow, Ada? I hate the sight of him!"

She looked at me in pure surprise.

"My dear Gerald, how could I refuse to see him, when he is your own cousin?—beside, they have been so kind to me; I have just promised to go over to Sydenham to-morrow, and spend the day with his mother."

"Have you?" I replied, with more vexation than I chose to exhibit.

"Yes; and she has sent me such a beautiful present! only look here,"—and she showed me one of those large wicker baskets painted in white and gold, which are used for holding flowers, and which contained several plants of delicate hot-house roses, their pots carefully concealed by green moss.

"I was admiring these baskets in Mrs. Logan's

presence only the other day," continued Ada, "and inquired the price of them, but they were so dear that I would not buy one. Was it not kind of her to remember it?"

"Very kind, my dear! it is more than she has done for my sisters or myself. I am sure she has never given us anything; I am quite astonished at her liberality, and at a loss to account for the reason."

"Oh, she can only have done it with a view to please you, Gerald; she knows so little of myself. But I do not think the roses were *her* present. Mr. Thomas Logan did not exactly say so, but I fancy he had the basket filled before he brought it here."

This information did not by any means tend to increase my satisfaction. I had made it my business and pleasure, since my engagement to Ada, to see that her rooms should always be well supplied with flowers, both cut and otherwise, and I considered it a piece of impertinence on the part of Mr. Thomas Logan or Mr. Anybody Else, to intrude upon my especial province; and I was jealous that she should accept the attention or appear pleased with it.

"Oh, he did, did he?" I remarked: "I am glad he was so happy as to think of such a thing, and that you seem so perfectly to appreciate his offering."

She looked at me for a moment, as if not quite sure whether I was in jest or earnest, and then she said, inquiringly—

"You will come with me to Sydenham to-morrow, Gerald?"

"I can't, thank you; I have an engagement."

Her countenance fell.

"Oh, I am so sorry. I made sure you would be able to accompany me. Where are you going?"

"To Richmond, to dine with the Lascelles."

I had been too proud (since she had apparently forgotten it) to mention our half engagement for the Opera; but as soon as I heard that she had pledged herself to spend the day with the Logans I determined that I would join my other cousins.

"And you can't give it up?"

"I have no wish to give it up, Ada. The Logans are no favourites of mine; I am quite out of my element at Sydenham, and I am sure

you will not miss me whilst you have such a gentleman as my cousin Thomas to dangle after you."

Her eyes, full of tender reproof, were raised to mine.

"If I were not *certain* that you can be only joking, Gerald, I could almost be angry with you for speaking so foolishly."

"Foolishly or not, my dear Ada, you must manage to go to Sydenham without me, for I shall be a dozen miles in the other direction."

"I dare say it is just as well," she said, quietly, "for Mrs. Logan has asked me to take Willie, and I know you do not like to travel in the company of babies."

"Oh, by heavens, no!" I exclaimed; "under the circumstances, I wonder you asked me."

It was an unkind thing to say, because I knew that she had never quite recovered the little disappointment she had felt at the evident dissatisfaction I had displayed upon first learning that she was a mother. She changed the subject suddenly after my last remark, and we talked of other things. Yet the visit was not a happy one, and our farewell was less tender than usual.

I did not see her again before she started for Sydenham, and at four o'clock the next afternoon I was driving my cousin George down to Richmond, not feeling particularly happy, but defiantly determined to be so.

We had nearly reached our destination, when I happened to remark to him how intimate I had become with every object on the road.

"They really should invent some fresh places to dine at," I said; "I have been to Richmond so often that I am sick of it."

"So am I," he replied; "but women always prefer Richmond to Greenwich."

"We have no women of the party, to-day," I rejoined, quickly.

George bit his lip as if he was conscious of having let the cat out of the bag.

"I thought you told me yesterday there was to be no one but ourselves and a few other fellows," I said, in a tone of vexation.

"Well," he replied, hesitatingly, "*I* didn't invite any; but Jack said something about Charlestown and himself bringing down some of their friends."

He looked wistfully in my face, as if expect-

ing an answer from me, but I made him none. I was annoyed at his intelligence: I knew what sort of friends Master Jack was likely to take down with him, and I guessed that they had all combined to play a trick upon me. George did not like my silence; and presently he added almost apologetically—

"I say, old fellow, I'm very sorry about it; but you won't be such a fool as to turn back or to be angry, will you?"

I had felt half inclined to do the former, simply because I did not choose to be duped by them; but a thought of Ada at Sydenham, waited on by my red-headed cousin, flashed into my mind, and I vented my indignation upon the flanks of my horse instead.

"You need not be afraid," I answered; "I have agreed, and I will go through it; but I must say, George, I think *you* are getting rather too old to lend your countenance to such boyish tricks. Knowing my wishes, you might have told me beforehand."

Here our conversation on the subject dropped, and a few minutes afterwards we drew rein at the door of the hotel, though not before the

rest of the party had arrived. As soon as I joined it, I perceived that my surmise was correct. The lady guests were such as accept the invitation of bachelors, and receive them from no one else, and consisted of four or five pretty faces picked up behind the scenes of the Opera and elsewhere: what others could I have expected to meet in such hair-brained company! Unfortunately, however, for myself, I happened to be, or to have been, personally acquainted with most of them: I was therefore soon taken forcible possession of, and rallied in complimenting, and teased into flirting, in atonement for my late heavy sins in having avoided their society, whilst Jack and his madcap friends took delight in urging them on to try and make me account for having deserted my old haunts and abandoned my old ways.

To resist the storm of questions by which I was assailed was naturally a task of difficulty: my fair opponents attacked me on every side, until they had driven me into a corner, to escape from which I was compelled to make myself agreeable, and turn the subject to that of their own charms; a never-failing

method when you wish to make women forget any other.

But my *ruse* could not succeed without my permitting them to imagine that I meant what I said; and when we sat down to dinner I had one of the prettiest girls in the room on either side of me, each equally certain that I admired her the most. It was treason to let a thought of Ada cross my mind in such companionship, yet it had possession of me throughout the festivities. Above the mirth and laughter by which I was surrounded, and in which I joined, the idea of what *she* would say could she but see me there, rose perseveringly. I knew that I was breaking the promise I had made to her; that such as this were the scenes which she had condemned; and whilst I resolved that I would leave the party as soon as ever the dinner was concluded, I cursed the weakness which had permitted me to join in it even so far.

The farrago of nonsense with which I responded to the lively rattle of my neighbours on either side had no power to quell these reflections for a moment; they overbalanced all my attempts at gaiety; and in order to conceal

them from the observation of others, I talked fast and drank deeply. When dessert was placed on the table, some of the company strolled into the hotel garden, which overlooked the river, whilst others, amongst which was myself, lingered over their wine. I was still at the height of my forced spirits, when I heard the voice of Jack Lascelles, none the clearer for the modicum of liquor he had imbibed, remonstrating with some one outside.

"Oh! come in, old fellow! what's the use of not coming in? Jerry's with us. Jerry will be delighted to see you; do come in."

And in another minute he appeared before the open glass doors dragging Joshua Estcourt after him, looking exceedingly sheepish, and unwilling to join the party. I was surprised at the sight, for the Lascelles only knew Joshua as a cousin of mine; but I opined rightly that if Master Jack had been quite himself, he would not have been so eager to insist upon the acceptance of his impulsive invitation.

"Look here, Jerry," he said, in explanation; "I found your cousin outside there! make him sit down, and have a glass of wine, there's a

good fellow; we can take him back in the drag, you know; there's lots of room. Now, Estcourt, make yourself at home," and having discharged the duties of hospitality, Jack flew off to resume his stroll in the garden.

"What brings you here this evening?" I asked, not over cordially, I confess, of the new comer. His foolish face reddened, and, in his confusion, it appeared to me that he blurted out the truth without intending to do so.

"Oh! I don't know; nothing particular!" he stammered. "I heard from Logan that you were down here, and I just came to see what you were all about."

The idea at once struck me, was it possible that I could be watched? and, absurd as it seemed, I could not dismiss it. Ada, I knew, was above exercising such unworthy *espionage*, and who else had any interest in doing so? Yet the bare question was sufficiently irritating to cause all my good resolutions to leave Richmond early to fade away as if by magic: my pride rose up in arms; and I determined that whoever had enlisted Joshua Estcourt in his service should learn that I was not a man

to be frightened into walking in the straight path. Under this resolve, my answer to my cousin's remark was as stern as if I had convicted him of the supposed intention.

"Thank you. Next time I require your *surveillance* I will let you know. Shall we go into the garden?"

The question was addressed to one of the girls who had sat next me during dinner, and, on her assent, we rose, and left Joshua Estcourt to entertain himself. When we returned to coffee, he was gone.

"Where's your cousin, Jerry?" demanded Jack, whose articulation had become still further affected by the evening air.

"I don't know," I replied, "and I don't care. What made you bring him in, Jack?"

"I found him loitering about the garden, and I thought it must be deuced slow work, so I asked him to come and take a glass of wine with us. Queer fellow, isn't he? always blushing."

Here there arose a peal of contemptuous laughter from the women, who are ever quick to ridicule any man who systematically aspires to rob them of their heavenly prerogative to blush.

"He is a greater fool than I take him for," I answered, warmly, "if he came down here on any business but his own. Yet I can't help thinking he had a particular object in view. We're not the boys to submit to a spy in the camp, are we, Jack?"

"I should rather think not, Jerry. By the way, you won't return to town yet awhile, will you?"

"Not a moment before yourself, old chum."

"Hurrah! that's right. I hate having my enjoyment cut short; George said something about your going back at nine."

"George knows nothing about it," and I actually allowed my ruffled pride and equanimity to make me consent to Jack settling the time for our return, which he did not do until all the respectable hours had struck and been done with, and then I have strong reasons for believing that George Lascelles drove me home instead of my driving him. I know that I woke late on the afternoon of the succeeding day, feeling very guilty and very unwilling to show myself at Kensington; not that I thought Ada Penryhn would have heard of my dissipation, but that I

feared I should not be able to face the inquiries she was sure to make, without betraying myself.

I was very foolish, but I had not yet learnt to deceive.

As the cool of the evening came on, however, I found my way there, but for the first time since I had been engaged to her, I was refused admittance. The woman who answered the door could not tell me if her mistress was ill or well; she had simply received orders to deny her to all visitors.

"Run up to Mrs. Penryhn and tell her it is I."

The servants were all aware of the close tie which was about to unite us, and the smile with which my bidding was executed seemed to intimate that there was little doubt of the issue; but if so, we were both too confident, for the only answer my message received was, that Mrs. Penryhn was sorry she could not admit me that evening as she was unequal to seeing any visitors. Under the circumstances, the excuse was so formal that I turned away from the door without further comment, but by the next day I concluded that perhaps it was the servant's mode of rendering the message which made it appear so,

and in some anxiety for Ada's health called at the house again, with an inquiry concerning it.

"My mistress will see you to-day, sir," was the only answer I received. Delighted with the assurance, I sprang up stairs, and found her in the drawing-room, a little pale perhaps, but otherwise looking just the same as usual. I was about to take the privilege which a day's absence generally gained for me; but somehow, Ada had placed a table between us, and I could only press the hand she tendered me across it.

"How are you, dearest?" I commenced; "you were ill yesterday, were you not? had one of your bad headaches I suppose, or were over-fatigued by your trip to Sydenham."

But Ada could not dissemble, even by insinuation.

"No; I was neither," she replied; "I could not see you, or any one, but it was not sickness that prevented me."

"I am thankful for that at any rate; how did you enjoy yourself at the Logans?"

Her features worked for a moment as though she was uncertain whether to weep, or to be angry, and then she exclaimed—

"Oh, Gerald, don't play with me; you know what upset me yesterday; you have broken your promise."

This sudden accusation took me so completely by surprise, that I could not have denied the fact to her, even had I wished to do so. I guessed at once through what source she must have heard the truth, but it was truth, and there was an end of it. I have no doubt I looked foolish, as I stood before her, with my eyes on the ground, and spinning a teetotum of Willie's round and round upon the tiny table, but all I said was, 'Who told you of it, Ada?"

"That signifies little," she replied, "but I am at liberty to tell you: it was Mrs. Logan."

"So I thought."

"But can you deny it, Gerald? that you went down to Richmond the day before yesterday, in company, the avoidance of which was the condition of your engagement to me, and that you did not return to Brook Street until the next morning?"

The teetotum spun away with so much energy that it fairly danced off the little table, and fell with a clatter amongst the fire-irons, as I gave

vent to the first oath which had ever left my lips in her presence.

"Forgive me, Ada, but *who* is it that dares to watch my residence, and intrude upon my privacy in this manner?"

I was the more angry that not having a very distinct idea of when I had returned home on that occasion, I could not refute the accusation as I would otherwise have done.

"I do not know," she replied; "all I can say is, that Mrs. Logan came to see me yesterday morning, and told me that it was the case. I believe she quoted your cousin, Joshua Estcourt, as her authority, but I was so taken aback by the news that I can hardly remember. Is it true, Gerald? tell me that it is not so, and I will take your word against that of all the world."

I was silent.

"Then it *is*," she said, bitterly, "and I am not worth even so much to you."

"You are above all value to me, Ada," I exclaimed; "only hear my version of the story. It is true that I dined at Richmond in the company of a few little *coryphées*, but when I told

you of my intention to do so, I had no knowledge of whom the party was to consist."

"But when you became aware of it?" she asked, anxiously.

"There lay my fault. I meant to have left directly after dinner, but Joshua Estcourt intruded on us and ruffled my temper, and altogether—I was drawn into it: you don't know how hard it is for a man, under such circumstances, to quit the society of women without having a good reason to give for doing so."

"Harder apparently than to wound the feelings of one whom you have promised to marry," she said, in a tone of disappointment.

"Something is due to politeness, Ada."

"Yes, and something to me," she rejoined, "although you will find plenty of women, as you pass through the world, who will glory in making you forget it."

"Ada, your sex is ever unjust, both to one another and to us."

"Not to one another, Gerald, or at least I am not. I have the keenest sympathy with women, even such women as you dined with at Richmond. I can enter into all their feelings with regard to

men: their desire to fascinate [illegible]
admiration, their pleasure [illegible]
nature, implanted with [illegible]
with our growth: and [illegible]
quarry. If you, as an [illegible]
society as if you were [illegible]
blame, not being [illegible]
attempt your capture: [illegible]
on their side by their [illegible]
only a fresh triumph cannot [illegible]
knowledge of your [illegible]
you."

"I did not flirt [illegible]
done so. I could [illegible]
to yourself [illegible]
different [illegible]
when [illegible]
[illegible]
talk [illegible]
all [illegible]
the [illegible]
[illegible]
[illegible]

of such a thing without being somewhat lowered in my estimation."

"Nor can you without losing in mine," she answered, decidedly. "This is but another thread, Gerald, of that tangled web, social law, which neither you nor I shall ever live to see put right, but of the wrongs of which I am so much convinced, that I am determined I will never lend by acquiescence a helping hand to their continuance. It is this conviction that made me exact that promise from you of a quiet life as the condition of our engagement; it is this also which would urge me at any time to act against the laws of society if by that means I could help a woman oppressed, where a man would go free."

"It is all very well to think so," I replied; "others have thought it before you; but if you were put to the test, you would find how hard it is to act counter to social law, in the teeth of the scandal and detraction which you would meet at the hands of your respectable friends."

"Try me!" she said, with flushed cheeks and kindling eyes, looking ready to commence her assault upon the world.

"I trust you will never be so tried, Ada; I should be very sorry to see you in such a position. Society may be imperfect, but her rules are like those of the Medes and Persians, they alter not nor are they to be transgressed with impunity."

"Then you have nothing but excuses to make for yourself, Gerald," she continued, sadly. "You do not consider that if you feel no sorrow for giving me pain, the same thing may happen again; and it were best, perhaps, that I released you at once from a promise which can only gall you, and make your life tiresome instead of pleasant.'

"Release me, Ada! what! from my engagement to you?"

"If I release you from one, it must be from both, Gerald. I cannot retract the terms of my condition, '*All or none.*'"

"Oh, take *all*, Ada!" I exclaimed, horror-struck at her proposal; "make me your own, and my fancy even shall never wander from where you are."

She smiled at my ardour, but she placed her hand in mine, and I knew that the time of my forgiveness was drawing near.

"That is a very common mistake, Gerald,"

she said, in answer to my last assertion, "but it has proved itself false too often. Marriage will not alter your nature nor your tastes; it may divert them for a little while, but, the novelty past, they will return in full force. I must have some better proof that you will be content with a domestic life, than your merely thinking so, before we settle down together."

I thought her cruel and prosaic and hard of belief, and I told her so; but she was not moved by any of my reproaches.

"It is for both our sakes," she said, gently. "If our happiness proved to be fallacious, you would suffer, dearest, as much as myself. Show me that you are above temptation, that you are not only able to see the right but strong enough to do it, and I shall have no fears for either you or myself."

"Then I am quite forgiven, dear Ada?"

She stooped down and pressed her lips upon my forehead. Her caresses meant more than those of most women, for she was slow to give and to accept them; but there was no mistaking the sincerity of this, and I felt that it was the medium of a full and free pardon.

After a little of the happy converse which usually follows the healing of a lovers' breach, my thoughts reverted to the means by which Ada had been informed of my peccadillo, and I told her that I intended to resent the interference of the Logans in my affairs by dropping their acquaintance altogether. But this resolve I found to my surprise, instead of meeting with her approval, only served as the occasion for further reproof to myself.

"I think you would be exceedingly unwise to make a quarrel of it," she said, "especially with such near relations. Had Mrs. Logan's story been untrue, I should still have advised more forbearance; but since it was perfectly correct, what possible ground can you take up for offence?"

"Her ill-nature in repeating it," I answered; "she can but have done it with a view to injuring me in your good opinion."

But Ada, with all her sense, had not gained the same sort of experience as I had, and she could not conceive such ingrained malice as most of my father's family bore towards myself.

"Scarcely that, dear Gerald, though I allow

she lost no time in telling me the news. Still, I had expressed anxiety about you the evening before, and she had some shopping to do in town that morning. Let us accredit her with the best motive we can, and lay her promptitude, partly to a wish to gratify my curiosity, and partly to a feminine love of gossip."

"Lay it to what you will, Ada, it is on a piece with their behaviour to me since my birth. I will not make an open quarrel of this, since you desire otherwise; but I shall be very cool with Mrs. Logan from this time forward, and if you love me you will be the same."

It was the worst step I could have advised her to take, both for my interest and her own, for, whilst our decrease of cordiality was visible enough to render the Logans more strongly disposed against us, the terms on which we continued were not sufficiently altered to prevent our occasional meeting. By this means, whilst I kindled a fresh resentment in the breast of my aunt and her family, I adopted no measures by which the indulgence of it might be restrained.

CHAPTER XIII.

It was a very quiet month with me that succeeded the little episode of the Richmond dinner. Under a promise of secresy, I unburdened my breast to my cousins, the Lascelles; told them of the scrape into which I had fallen, and begged them to desist from entrapping me further; and once convinced that I had a solid reason for my abstinence, they proved the friends to me they had ever been. I joined few bachelors' parties during that time and none of the respectability of which I was not assured; but I was happier notwithstanding, if less gay, than I ever remember to have been before. I met Ada at several dinner-parties, balls, and other fashionable assemblies; and was never weary of listening to the comments passed upon her

personal and mental charms. I have purposely avoided, in these pages, giving a minute description of the perfections of my betrothed, because I feel I might only convey a wrong impression of her by the attempt, and that, without such fear, a woman's lover is not the proper person to paint her portrait. That she was beautiful I trust my readers will accredit me sufficient good taste to believe; that she was virtuous and sensible, the details of her life afford the best proof. I watched at this period, with the deepest interest and pleasure, the increasing influence which she gained over the members of my own family. Emmeline, who corresponded regularly with her and myself, could never say enough in praise of Ada's sentiments and feelings; Beatrice was fain to acknowledge that the future Mrs. Estcourt was as discreet as she was pretty; and even Gertrude took an opportunity to say she regretted the letter she had sent me on the occasion of my engagement; for, that the more she saw of my choice, the more she approved it. Yes! that was a happy month, free from all jars and misunderstandings: how often I looked back upon it afterwards, and wondered I had

ever found enjoyment in pleasures less innocent! It was the first of July, the anniversary of Ada's twenty-third birthday: I was to have a *tête-à-tête* dinner with her at Kensington. I took my way there, in capital spirits, for I carried with me the prettiest of all pretty sets of diamonds and opals for her acceptance, and was pleasing myself with the anticipation of her pleasure. Neither had I forgotten little Willie, for I knew that I could not earn the mother's gratitude better than by remembering the child; and somehow, the recollection of the handful of baby purchases which I ordered to be sent him on that day has lingered to give me satisfaction whilst more important things have faded from my memory. As I flew up the now familiar staircase, Ada came out upon the landing to meet me. She was robed in white, without a single ornament, unless one richly scented tea-rose in her bosom can be called such. Her luxuriant hair, partly rolled around her head, and partly lying on her shoulders, formed a warm framework for her delicately tinted face; her sweet eyes overflowed with love and gratitude; her firm cool hands clasped mine with a

ready and perfect trust. So, in my latter dreams, have angels from heaven appeared to me!

"How *good* of you," she commenced, "to think of baby! Dear Gerald, how can I thank you enough?"

"By not thanking mè at all, Ada," I replied; "for if you will let me hang these trifles upon your neck and arms, I shall owe a heavy debt of gratitude to you, instead."

I placed the case of ornaments in her hands as I spoke, and she opened and regarded them; but although her admiration of the beauty of the stones and workmanship was evident, no deeper feeling gleamed in her eyes than had been conjured there by the reception of little Willie's horse and Noah's ark.

"Let me put them on you, dearest," I said.

She submitted to the adorning without demur —only as I stepped backwards to observe the effect of the jewels flashing in her pretty ears and on her fair throat and arms, and whispered to her whether nature or art looked the most beautiful to me, she clasped her hands over mine and said—

"They are very handsome, but you are a

naughty boy to spend so much money on me; you know I should have received a bouquet of flowers from you with quite as much pleasure" —and I verily believe she was sincere.

Presently we sat down cosily to dinner, in an apartment fourteen feet by twelve, and with a single maidservant to attend to our wants. But I gazed at Ada over a damask-covered table, which was so decorated with flowers that there was scarcely room for anything else; good wine was sparkling in cut glass close to my hand; the champagne in its ice-pail lay at a convenient distance, and my lady insisted that it would do me all the good in the world for once to wait upon myself. Whether the charm of that birth-day dinner consisted in its novelty, or whether seeing Ada seated opposite to me roused my anticipations of coming happiness, I cannot say, but I know it was the pleasantest meal of which I had ever partaken. I must have allowed my feelings to get the better of my prudence, for we had not been long at table before she took me gravely to task for showing so much levity before the servant.

"This is the first time I have ever played

hostess to you, Gerald," she said, frowning at me playfully, "and I really think you might behave a little better."

"I hope it won't be the last, though," was my disobedient answer, "or perhaps we shall play it as a duet next time, Ada."

"I had a visitor this morning," she said, changing the subject, "and a gentleman visitor too! You'll never guess who he was."

"Then it is of no use my trying, dear."

"He is well known to yourself, though; a near relative into the bargain."

"Not George Lascelles?"

"Oh, no!—a stranger. What do you say to uncle Jabez?"

"Never, Ada! you are joking."

"I am not indeed. If my attention had been less occupied with your presents and your nonsense, I should have told you before. He walked in at eleven o'clock. Only fancy! what an hour to make a formal call! I was thunderstruck when Mary came and told me a gentleman wanted to see me at that time; I thought it could only be you or the tax-gatherer" ("Thank you for linking our names," I interposed), "but

when I descended to the drawing-room, there was uncle Jabez examining the *étagères.* I knew him directly from your description."

Here we both laughed so heartily that the maid-servant looked as if she thought we must have gone, in her own parlance, 'off our heads.'"

"And what did he say to you, Ada? what reason did he give for coming?"

"Oh! he only called to make my acquaintance; I think it was most *avuncular* of him. We sat together for more than half an hour, though I cannot say we talked much, but the little we said was to the purpose. I asked him if he did not think the weather was very warm; but he grunted so terrifically at that, that I did not venture to open my mouth again for a few minutes; at the end of which he inquired at what school I had placed my boy; and when I replied that Willie had only just learned to walk, so I had not yet thought of taking that step, he went off in such a series of grunts that I was quite frightened; and I don't think we exchanged another sentiment until he suddenly got up from his chair, gave a final growl for a good-bye, and walked out of the room. Pray don't

laugh so, my dear Gerald, or you will make yourself ill."

"That is just like uncle Jabez," I exclaimed; "his speech is as rough as his appearance. I wonder what the old bear thought of you, Ada; I should like to have seen you together; you must have looked like Beauty and the Beast."

"I do not think him so ugly," she replied. "He certainly does not trust to dress to improve his personal appearance, but he has a fine head and face, and his manner, though shockingly blunt, has a genuine ring about it."

"Yes, and does not belie itself," I answered; "uncle Jabez is sterling, I am convinced of that; he is my father without my father's polish."

We finished our dinner and went up stairs again, and soon after little Willie was brought in to bid good-night to his mother. "Do not leave him, nurse," said Ada, to his attendant. She always gave this order when I was present, betraying thereby that a different course was pursued in my absence. But I was too happy on that occasion to be ungracious.

"No! let him stay," I pleaded, "I want to have a game with the little fellow." The

mother's eyes filled with pleasure as I announced my desire, and she dismissed the servant without further ceremony. The little boy had now reached a very interesting age; he was nearly two years old, and his infantine ways and prattle were amusing to watch and listen to. He had become used to my company also, and was as familiar with me as with his mother. To please her, I now laid myself out to please the child, and we were soon engaged in some noisy romps, to the great peril of the various stands of ornaments with which the room was decorated.

When he was at last dismissed to bed, I threw myself, tired out, upon the sofa, and Ada came and sat in a low chair beside me.

"How kind you are to allow Willie to tease you in this way," she whispered, as she passed her hand over my heated forehead.

"Why so, Ada?" I asked, turning my head towards her; "shall I not stand in the position of a father to him one of these days?"

She smiled and blushed, but answered nothing. I caught the hand which was wandering amongst my hair, and held it prisoner.

"How soon is it to be, Ada? This is the

first of July, and I don't want to lose my shooting this year. Don't you think that a wedding about the first of August would wind up the season very nicely, and just leave us a month in which to go abroad before we settle down at Grasslands for the winter?"

This speech was made half in jest and half in earnest, but I knew that she could separate the wheat from the chaff, and that she was too true and unaffected to refuse me an answer.

"Shall it be this time next month, dearest?" I repeated. I was looking up into her face as I lay, and I watched the warm blood creeping through her veins as she considered my proposal. "Make up your mind, Ada; is it so unpleasant a question to decide?"

She shook her head, and laughed.

"Yes, or no, then."

"If you wish it, Gerald."

"Really and truly, darling," I exclaimed, joyfully, leaping off the sofa.

"Really and truly! when I promised to be yours, did I make any conditions but one? My fears are dissolving, Gerald; I trust you, and believe you worthy of my trust."

My rapture at her assurance almost caused her wonder. She placed too little faith in her powers of fascination; she could not value the gift of herself at the high price that I did. For the remainder of the evening I was in a perfect turmoil of delight; I could neither think nor speak of anything but my anticipated marriage; so much so that at last Ada warned me that nothing was certain in this world.

"Not certain!" I exclaimed; "why, what can come between us? In the possession of your love, dearest, I would defy misfortune to her face;" and I continued in the same state of excitement until I left her to walk home.

The night was close and warm, and I was heated and had no fancy for travelling in a cab. Yet to this hour I can recall her white-robed figure as she hung over the banisters and entreated me to let her send the servant to fetch one for me.

"No, thank you, Ada; a walk will do me good; I am too happy to sleep well without it. When can I see you to-morrow?"

"At any time you like. Will you come to luncheon?"

"Without fail. Good-night, my dearest."

The servant was waiting to close the door after me; the sweet face gazing over the banisters looked the blessing she would not speak before another; and with a farewell upward glance I passed the threshold and commenced to skirt the gardens on my way to Brook Street. Sauntering along with my cigar in my mouth and my hands in my pockets, and dreaming every event of the evening over again, I was blissfully content. For me, metaphorically speaking, were flowers springing from each crevice of the unyielding flag-stones upon which I trod; life lay stretched before me, like a vast calm lake upon which the waves of this troublesome world possessed no influence; and Ada seemed as indissolubly mine as if the prospective vows had been pronounced between us. Governed by such feelings I was not likely to accord much attention to what was passing around me, yet the hour being late, and the pavement between Kensington and Piccadilly almost deserted, it was not long before I was forced to rouse myself to the consciousness that I was being tracked, by the pertinacity of some female who, in breathless haste, passed me more

than once, and then retracing her footsteps, met and regarded me fixedly. Still I went on, wrapt in my own thoughts, and taking little heed of her movements until she stopped short before me, and the words, given hurriedly but with a perfect accent, "Mr. Estcourt, allow me to speak to you," brought me likewise to a standstill. By my pseudonym of "Jerry" I was universally known about town, but it greatly puzzled me to conjecture who could have thus learnt to address me by my family name. My first thought was of Julia Sherman, but if the tones of the voice had not undeceived me, a pair of large black eyes flashing under the lamplight would soon have done so, and as I took off my hat I intimated that in respect of our acquaintance she had the advantage of me.

"I know it," replied the stranger, "but you will recognise me directly you hear my name. I have watched for you very often and very long. I am glad we have met at last. I have much to say to you. You will come home with me?"

Her last words were delivered in a tone of mingled doubt and entreaty, and she made a

movement as if she would lay her hand upon my arm. But I drew backwards, saying coldly—

"It is impossible. I have other business to attend to. I am going straight to my own house."

A shade of disappointment, visible enough at the distance she stood from me, passed over the woman's face.

"You will not come?" she exclaimed, "and when I have waited for this so long. You do not know what trouble I have taken to intercept you in your walks to and from Brook Street; how many evenings I have watched for hours but in vain; either you did not go to Kensington or you drove home. And now you refuse to listen to what I have to tell you."

I started again. This stranger, whoever she was, knew not only my name, but my place of residence, and that to which my frequent visits were paid. I was not only surprised, I was angry.

"Who *are* you," I demanded, "that you appear to have made yourself so intimate with my private affairs? What is your business with me?"

"That is what I wish to tell you, Mr. Est-

court, but I cannot tell you here. Come home with me, and you shall know all. Why do you hesitate? what is it that you fear?"

"I fear nothing from you," I answered, not too politely, "but I hate mysteries; if your business is honest, why not disclose it?"

The woman seemed to hesitate for a moment; then advancing a step nearer to me, she lowered her voice to a whisper—

"It concerns *Ada Penryhn*," she said, distinctly. "Now will you come?"

In a moment she had aroused my keenest interest.

"What of her?" I exclaimed, in astonishment; "what right have you to use her name? to speak of her to me?"

"Come, and I will tell you," was the laconic answer.

"And you will not tell me here?"

"I cannot: my news is of too much importance."

I hesitated no longer. I felt that I was bound to hear by what authority this stranger had mentioned the name which was sacred to me. Having heard so much I should hear her

without further parley. In another moment I had called a cab, and we were rattling together over the noisy stones to the address which she gave me. There was no opportunity for converse during the period of transition, and I sat back in my corner of the vehicle, silent, but determined to keep to the resolution I had formed. The house to which she had invited me was situated in one of the streets at the back of Park Lane, and not far from my own residence. As I observed this, I wondered that my mysterious acquaintance had not embraced an occasion for speaking to me when I was nearer home. Little time, however, was left for speculation before we had arrived at the end of our journey; when throwing down the fare, before I could anticipate her action, in what appeared to me a careless and indifferent manner, she ran up the steps, opened the door, and ushered me through a hall, into a well-furnished drawing-room. Then she turned, and motioned me to a seat, and I saw by the lighted gas that she was a middle-aged woman, bearing the traces of having been beautiful, but out of whose countenance trouble, or a reckless life, had

washed all present comeliness. She was tall and painfully slight: had a pale complexion, straight features, and luminous dark eyes, which instantly reminded me, either by shape or expression, of some I had seen, but of *whose* I had no conception. I perceived, however, that whatever her mode of living, she was undoubtedly a gentlewoman, yet I continued standing with my hat in my hand, and would not accept her offer of a chair.

"You have mentioned a name," I said, "in which I am interested, and you have intimated that the fact is known to you; to learn from whom you can have obtained your information is the sole reason for which I have consented to accompany you here; and I cannot stay longer than is needed to effect my purpose."

"Perhaps you will change your mind, Mr. Estcourt, when you hear my story. Meanwhile I suppose I have no right to expect otherwise from you."

Yet there was a dash of bitterness infused in her words, and she passed her hand wearily over her furrowed forehead.

"I am all attention," I said, presently, wish-

ing to recall her to the purpose for which I was there. She started nervously, crossed the carpet to where I stood, and laying her hand upon my arm, looked anxiously in my face.

"I have your promise of secrecy?" she asked.

"So far as it lies in my power to give it."

"But it *must* lie in your power, or my lips are closed, and you leave this house as ignorant of my identity as you entered it. Swear to me that you will not repeat to any one whatever I may say to you this night which concerns *myself*."

"Whatever relates to *yourself* I promise not to reveal."

"Not my name or place of residence; not even the fact of my existence."

"Certainly not; you have my word. I can have no interest in speaking of them."

I was burning with impatience to hear what she could possibly have to tell me respecting my betrothed; I cared nothing for her name or herself, still less considered it likely I should ever wish to mention them again.

"I know you are a gentleman, Mr. Estcourt," she replied, "and I will trust you. You have been surprised at my knowledge of yourself and

Ada Penryhn; and you are curious to hear me say by what means I became acquainted with her name and yours. Am I not correct?"

"You are," I answered; "more than that, I am waiting to hear you tell me by what *right* you couple that lady's name with mine, or mention hers at all."

Suddenly the woman withdrew her hand from my arm, and used it as a covering for her face.

"I have no *right*, Mr. Estcourt, oh! I have lost my right," she wailed; "*I am her mother!*"

CHAPTER XIV.

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed, "is it possible?"

Yet, as soon as she had spoken I was convinced of the truth of her assertion. Every tale that I had heard relative to the unfortunate Mrs. Rivers immediately rushed upon my memory. My father's glowing accounts of her beauty; her daughter's faint but fond recollections of her personal appearance; the reminiscences of such of my friends as knew her when she was living under the protection of her husband, came back into my mind, and left me no room to doubt that it was indeed the victim of Lord Edward Grieves who stood before me. She was faded it is true, and aged beyond her years; but it was a miserable shadow of Ada that I beheld; Ada, with darker eyes and hair, careworn and

haggard; but still Ada in the expression of the dreamy gaze, the nervous mouth, and in the grace of the willowy figure.

The knowledge shocked me. The ill-disguised contempt with which I had regarded this unfortunate woman; the *brusquerie* with which I had addressed her, smote me with compunction; and eager to atone for my behaviour, I quickly left my position, and advanced to where, shrinking from the surprise expressed in my exclamation, she had thrown herself into a chair.

"Mrs. Rivers," I commenced, "forgive me for the rudeness I have unintentionally shown you. You should not have kept me so long in ignorance of your identity."

"It is of no consequence; I have become used to repulsion from the world, and I could not have told you who I was until I had obtained your promise of secrecy."

"But why did you not write to me to Brook Street? I would have visited you at any time."

"Would you? Had I been aware of that I might have done so; but being uncertain with what feelings you would regard such a request I preferred to remain *incognita* until I knew that

I was safe in revealing myself. But what matters it either way? However brought about, my object is effected; you are here, and good enough to say that you will listen to me; thank you for both."

She held out her hand as she spoke—a small white hand, recalling that of some one else powerfully to my mind. I took it in mine, and remembering only that she was Ada's mother, carried it respectfully to my lips. Perhaps the action touched her; perhaps it recalled a deference which was no longer hers; for tears filled her dark eyes, and it was some minutes before she could resume the conversation.

"You have a kind heart, Mr. Estcourt; I thank God for it! you will make a good husband to my child."

"And how do you know that I am to be her husband?" I asked curiously.

"How do I know it? How do I know everything that concerns her, from the places she frequents and the people she visits to the colour of the ribbon which ties her baby's frock-sleeves? Because I watch her actions—unknown to herself—day by day; because my only plea-

sure lies in following her footsteps like a shadow whenever it is in my power to do so; because in all this great city of London there is but one spot which possesses any interest for me, and that is, the house which contains my child."

In her excitement she had turned towards me and seized my hand, and her mournful eyes were gazing full into my own.

"Oh, Mr. Estcourt!" she exclaimed, "have pity upon me—tell me something of my daughter. I shall never press my lips upon her face again, remember; never hear her voice call me by the name which I have forfeited: but you are with her every day; you know her thoughts, and have her best affections lavished on you: out of your plenty, spare a little for my drought."

"What shall I tell you?" I said, moved beyond measure by the earnestness of her appeal.

"Tell me if she is *well*, if she is *happy*."

"Perfectly so, I believe. Her appearance should convince you of the first, her heart tells me that she is the second."

"And does she ever speak of *me*, Mr. Estcourt? has she any remembrance of me? have

you ever heard her take my name on her pure lips?"

She put this question in a nervous, anxious manner, as if she dreaded to hear that she was quite forgotten. But I assured her that Ada often mentioned her, and always with regret; and that the subject of her mother, whatever unpleasant recollections it evoked, was still a sacred one with her.

I did not tell her of the profound compassion which her daughter had expressed towards her sufferings, nor of the many tears which she had shed over their recital; for as yet I knew nothing beyond the fact that she had been her father's wife, and I dreaded lest a too glowing account of Ada's sympathy might induce her to propose a meeting between them, to which the daughter's heroic sense of duty would forbid her not to accede. I looked around the well-furnished room and took in the many evidences of luxury by which it was filled; I glanced at Mrs. Rivers's dress, which was everything that a gentlewoman's need be; and at her hands, which sparkled with rings; and decided afresh that I could not be too careful in what I told her of

Ada's sentiments towards herself. I had too much manly feeling not to pity and refrain from condemning the unhappy mother before me, but I could not forget that her daughter was to be my wife.

"And you love her?" she said, anxiously; "you love her truly; you will be a faithful husband to her, and a good father to her children?"

I replied that, God helping me, that was what I hoped to be; that my affection for Ada was very steady and sincere; and that my greatest wish was to do my duty to her in every respect.

Still Mrs. Rivers did not appear satisfied.

"You will not wean her love from you by little and little?" she continued; "you will consult her wishes, and be patient with her weakness, and guard her from every possible danger?"

"I will indeed," I replied; "the aim of my existence shall be to make her happy. I have never loved any woman but herself; I have never seen another whom I would ask to be my wife, and it is now four years since I first wished her mine. Depend upon it, when the prize is once within my grasp, I shall not easily let it go again."

"And when is the marriage to be?" was her next question.

"In a month," I answered, confidently, and with a joyful remembrance of the evening I had just passed at her side.

"Ah! so soon? Heaven bless her!" was the mother's prayer, and my heart echoed it. I had seated myself by this time, and patiently waited until the reverie into which Mrs. Rivers had fallen after her last words should end. Presently she roused herself, and said hurriedly as she rung the bell—

"Pray forgive my forgetfulness, Mr. Estcourt, but you will take something, will you not?"

To this offer I returned a decided negative, telling her how lately I had dined; but she would take no refusal to her hospitality, and soon afterwards a man-servant appeared bearing wine and other refreshments. The tray upon which they were carried was silver, and all other appointments were in keeping. I looked with a suspicious eye upon this display of comfort, and the pity which Mrs. Rivers's first appeal had excited in my breast seemed to cool under the inspection.

"I am so glad to have seen you," she said, as we drew near the table together; "as soon as I heard that my daughter was engaged to be married again, and to the son of my old friend Parton Estcourt, I was anxious to make your acquaintance. I knew your father well."

"I am aware of it," I answered; "he has spoken of you to me."

The blush which so instantly mounted into her faded cheek reminded me of Ada's sudden blushes; and I caught myself wondering if *my* wife would have any such occasion to redden with shame when she had reached the same age, and shuddered whilst I thought so; and hated myself the next moment for daring to shudder or to think.

"Doubtless! my name has been common enough in the mouths of men; you know my history, Mr. Estcourt; there is no need for me to recapitulate it. At the time I left Colonel Rivers I thought that I had one excuse; that of a home which he had made wretched by his infidelity and unkindness; but now when I think of my daughter without a mother's care passing through the same temptations to which I was

subjected. I know that I had none; and that whatever my trials I should have retained the charge which Heaven had given me in her. But it is no use to speak of that now; it can never serve Ada either as counsel or warning. But you, who will have her happiness completely in your power, to make or mar as you will, see that you are as faithful to her as you require she shall be to you. The first thing which tempted me to go astray was my husband taunting me with the fact that, so long as he abstained from assaulting me, he might do as he chose and I could obtain no redress. It set me thinking whether I might not take the law into my own hands, and prove to him and the world that I thought as little of his honour as he did of mine. Revenge was the impulse which prompted me to take the step that made me what I am; and upon how many women has it not acted in like manner! Revenge is a stronger feeling than love, Mr. Estcourt."

"Perhaps so," I answered; "fortunately I have as yet had no experience of it."

"Nor ever will have, I trust. Do not run away with the idea that I wish to excuse myself.

I am past all that. Only remember my words if ever you should feel inclined to throw such a truth in my daughter's face. The law is hard upon us women; we feel our impotency; we know we cannot rid us of our shackles; and so we burst them violently, and defy the world with the broken links still clinging to our wrists and ankles. We bruise ourselves 'tis true, and bitterly; but we bruise you into the bargain; and half of it might be prevented if, knowing us to be but women, you did not treat us like men."

"It is an old grievance, Mrs. Rivers," I replied, rising to take my leave, "and one which no words will mend. I feel deeply for the situation in which you are placed, and would do anything that I could to alleviate it, if, as you say, it admitted of any remedy; but I fear that with the expression of my sympathy all my power ends."

"Not so!" she exclaimed, "you have promised to love my child and to guard her with all your might from a fate such as mine, and not to reveal to her by word or look that you are conscious even of my existence—is it not the case? I would sooner die than she should learn that I am living near her and yet unfit to

speak to my own daughter; if the least hint reached her of the fact, I should go far away, where I should never have the chance of meeting her again, and then the little pleasure left me would be destroyed. You will not take it from me, Mr. Estcourt?"

"Certainly not," I replied decisively; "Ada shall never hear one word from me of this evening's interview: I should consider such a step most injudicious. The knowledge of your vicinity could only have the effect of greatly upsetting her; it could never make any difference in lowering the barrier between you."

This I said rather sternly, remembering the position in which I stood to the daughter; almost too much so perhaps, considering that the woman who stood by me was her mother; but I spoke under the influence of very strong feelings, and I felt that it could not be otherwise. Mrs. Rivers however did not appear to notice anything harsh in my manner; on the contrary, she again thanked me for the promise I had given.

"May I ask you to come and see me again before you are married?" she said wistfully, as I held her hand at parting.

"I will certainly come if you wish it," I replied.

"Oh, that is very good of you!" she exclaimed, her dark eyes lighting up with a remnant of their old fire. "You will come and bring me word how she is, and tell me of your plans, and where you are likely to settle. You will not forget it —stay! here is a reminder for you. No! be quiet, it is only a trifle to recall me and your promise sometimes to your mind;" and as she spoke, she slipped a ring off one of her own fingers on to mine. I hesitated to accept the gift; in fact I wished to return it. I represented to her that I should have no need of anything to remind me to keep my word, and I should be greatly obliged if she would allow me to replace the ring on her finger. But she would take no denial. She insisted on my retaining the ornament, told me that if I did not wish to keep it I could throw it into the first gutter that I crossed, or present it to the first beggar I met, but she was determined not to receive it again; therefore I had no alternative but to thank her for her kindness. When I left her she accompanied me to the hall door and opened it herself, and

I was already half way down the steps which led to the street when she said softly—

"Mr. Estcourt! do not think worse of me than you can help; above all, never cast my conduct in Ada's teeth, nor attribute my child's shortcomings to my evil influence. We are all fallible, but I never harmed her, so help me heaven, except my prayers have done it."

I was compelled to return and assure her that her misfortunes were greater in my eyes than her faults. Much as I had tried to steel my heart against this woman, there was a fascination in her manner and an earnestness in her voice which enlisted my sympathy against the conviction of my better judgment; and as I finally quitted her side, and, looking back, saw her standing in the doorway and gazing after me into the night with her large, sad, dark eyes, I felt so tempted to retrace my steps and strive to speak some comfort to her, that it was by positive constraint I took my way to Brook Street without further parley. Arrived there, I sought my room at once, but I found it impossible to sleep. The chance which had brought me face to face with Ada Penryhn's mother was too strange to

be passed over as an ordinary occurrence; it had left my brain excited and confused, and instead of retiring to bed I sat up to think. It is true that I had often heard of Mrs. Rivers, often spoken of her, and that I believed she was living, but it had never occurred to me that I might meet her in my walks through London. Her transgression and her shame were things of a date gone by; the remembrance of them almost had died from the minds of men; I had never realised that she must be still a woman under middle age, and might be living in the very midst of us, frequenting the same places of public amusement and liable to be encountered during every stroll.

I could hardly realise it yet: it almost required the ring flashing on my fourth finger to enable me to do so, and with a view to that end I now examined it. It was thoroughly a woman's toy, although one of no mean value, being in the shape of a horseshoe and set with brilliants which flashed and scintillated as I turned them about beneath the light.

With a sigh I replaced it on my hand: was I sorry that she still lived to put it there, and

claim a promise for a future interview with herself? Did I regret that Ada's mother had not died in fact, when she died from out society; or that I had been less curious and more steadfast in my refusal to accompany her home? At this lapse of time I can hardly say; but I remember that the sight of the sparkling diamonds seemed to offend me, and that whilst I thought I crossed my arms upon my breast and hid them from my view.

For I had greater reason to be dissatisfied with my visit to Mrs. Rivers than the mere fact of the knowledge of her existence could make me. I had stood in her house in the position of a guest without a right to question her mode of life or action, but I had observed on all sides the appearance, if not of luxury, at least of such comfort as is unobtainable without a good income. Whence did Mrs. Rivers derive hers? I knew from what my sisters and Ada had told me of Lord Edward Grieves' penurious and selfish habits that it was very unlikely, if he allowed her anything, it would be more than was necessary for her actual requirements; yet I had found her residing in a good house, situated in a fashionable locality,

waited on by men-servants, and surrounded, as far as I could see, by everything she could desire. By whom was it all provided? These thoughts puzzled and vexed me far into the night, not for myself, but for their object. That *my* wife should ever be brought in contact with the plaything, cast-off or otherwise, of Lord Edward Grieves I had long before settled to be impossible; the incident of the past evening, therefore, I should have allowed to exert no influence upon her lot or mine, even had I not been bound down to keep it secret: but to have discovered her mother to be not only still living, but still under a cloud, was a great annoyance to me, and one which I could not easily shake off. I sat and pondered over it until the grey light appearing through the curtained window warned me that morning was at hand. Then I hastily threw off my clothes, flung myself on the bed, and notwithstanding the vexatious nature of my meditations, was soon wrapt in a profound slumber.

END OF VOL. II.

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